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Multilingualism in South Tyrol: between old fears and new challenges

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Abstract: This contribution illustrates the specific sociolinguistic landscape of South Tyrol, an Italian province where the majority of the population is German-speaking. First, we explain to what extent the division of society into separate language groups has remained in force to this day and to which degree this hinders the achievement of German-Italian bilingual everyday life. Secondly, the discussion focusses on residents with foreign citizenship (almost 10 % of the population) and how they deal with and live this local sociolinguistic situation. Against the backdrop of the changed transformed socio-demographic situation, we discuss possible strategies as to how the longstanding focus on bilingualism may be expanded to include multilingualism, which is already mostly in place.

Dieser Beitrag veranschaulicht die besondere soziolinguistische Situation Südtirols, in einem Teil Italiens, in dem die Mehrheit der Bevölkerung deutschsprachig ist. Zunächst wird vorgestellt, inwiefern die Aufteilung der Gesellschaft in getrennte Gruppen bis heute aufrecht geblieben ist und inwiefern das dem Erreichen einer zweisprachigen deutsch-italienischen alltäglichen Lebenswirklichkeit im Wege steht. In einem zweiten Schritt wird der Blick auf die Bürger*innen ohne italienische Staatsbürgerschaft in Südtirol gerichtet (10 % der Bevölkerung) und darauf, wie sie die lokale sprachliche Realität (er)leben. Vor dem Hintergrund der veränderten soziodemographischen Situation werden mögliche Strategien diskutiert, wie eine – im Grunde bereits vorhandene – Mehrsprachigkeit die vorherrschende Fokussierung auf eine bloße Zweisprachigkeit erweitern kann.

Keywords: multilingualism, South Tyrol, old and new minorities, language diversity; Mehrsprachigkeit, Südtirol, alte und neue Minderheiten, Sprachenvielfalt.

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1 Historical-sociological background and issues addressed

Due to its geographical position and for historical reasons, South Tyrol has always been a multilingual¹ area where the German- and Italian-speaking world come into contact. Following South Tyrol's annexation to Italy (1919), contact between language groups became an imposed coexistence due to the massive immigration of Italian-speakers from other Italian regions and the fascist repression against German culture and language. Fortunately, in the years following the Second World War, the right to speak German was restored and the language was officially recognised as equal to Italian. The enactment of the second Statute of Autonomy in 1972 (Giunta 2009) and of its Implementing Rules (starting from 1973)² formally brought peace between the German-speaking population and the Italian-speaking community. At the same time, it promoted the “social separation (voluntary, but politically conscious and politically driven) between language groups” (Pallaver 2017: 59 [authors' translation]) which is still in force today. There are several expressions of the dissociative model that still characterises local everyday life: the school system is strictly divided according to language and instruction in the mother tongue is guaranteed in German, Italian and Ladin³, i.e. there are three different school boards, employment in the public administration is subjected to the passing of a bilingualism exam (trilingualism, in case of Ladin speakers), public funds, political representation, positions in the public sector and social housing are allocated according to the relative strength of each language group,⁴ and cultural initiatives are proposed and supported through ethnically differentiated funding channels (cf. *ibid.*).

According to data from the latest census in 2011 (ASTAT 2012), 69.41 % of South Tyroleans belong to the German language group, 26.06 % to the Italian language group and 4.53 % to the Ladin one.⁵ The territorial distribution of the groups is extremely uneven: more than 80 % of the Italian-speaking population is concen-

¹ Here understood as “the knowledge of a number of languages, or the co-existence of different languages in a given society” (CEFR 2001: 4).

² Cf. Durchführungsbestimmungen zum Autonomiestatut: <https://www.landtag-bz.org/de/datenbanken-sammlungen/bestimmungen-autonomiestatut.asp>

³ The third official language of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano, spoken by the inhabitants of the Gardena and Badia valleys.

⁴ The size of the language groups is surveyed every 10 years with the census and serves as the basis for updating the proportional distribution of public places and resources (<http://www.provincia.bz.it/politica-diritto-relazioni-estere/autonomia/tutela-minoranze.asp>).

⁵ 453,272 valid declarations on a resident population of 505,067 (ASTATinfo 2012: 38).

trated in major towns (> 15,000 inhabitants) and more than half of all Italian speakers reside in Bolzano (55 %). In essence, 73 % of the Italian-speaking group lives in Bolzano and Merano, and the rest lives in other major towns and in Bassa Atesina. The German-speaking group resides mostly in rural municipalities and only a quarter of all German speakers are present in the major towns. These figures suggest that the distance between the language groups is not only institutional or mental but also physical and geographical. Especially from the perspective of the many German-speaking South Tyroleans living in areas where the Italian-speaking population is almost absent, this naturally leads to a rather conservative attitude towards bi/multilingualism (cf. Aschbacher 2017).

In the last 20 years, the local population has undergone considerable change as more and more people with foreign citizenship have settled in the province of Bolzano. As of 31.12.2019, there were 51,509 non-Italian residents, equal to 9.6 % of the total resident population (cf. IDOS 2020). Despite this important transformation in the composition of the local community, the “South Tyrolean system” of social separation outlined above does not seem to have undergone any other significant changes. Immigrants have to face the challenge of learning the two main languages and of declaring their affiliation to one of the three language groups. Nonetheless, it is still the dialectic, sometimes tense, relationship between the two major groups (German and Italian) that characterises life in the province of Bolzano. For this reason, it is not surprising – or perhaps it is for those who do not live in South Tyrol or do not know its society well –, that concepts intrinsic to the local school system and political debate, such as having German or Italian as mother tongue and language of instruction, or as a second or foreign language as well as (individual) bilingualism and (societal) bilingualism, are still highly relevant.

With data from two projects carried out at the Eurac Research Institute for Applied Linguistics, in our contribution we will illustrate to what extent South Tyrolean society is still striving to achieve widespread bilingualism (in this contribution, understood as the ability to actively participate in community life also in the respective second language, Italian or German), we will highlight some evident contradictions that hinder this process and we will try to point the way towards an effective multilingualism⁶ that is as widespread and sustainable as possible and that takes into account the transformed local society.

⁶ For the purposes of this paper, we define plurilingualism as “the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction where a person, viewed as a social agent, has proficiency of varying degrees, in several languages, and experience of several cultures” (CEFR 2001: 168) and multilingualism as the knowledge of a number of languages, or the co-existence of different languages in a given society (ibid.: 4).

2 Bilingualism in South Tyrol

Since the beginning of the history of the Autonomous Province after the end of the Second World War, the responsibility for ensuring the teaching of German and Italian and, in this light, for promoting bilingualism, has fallen to the local school system. The current school model was established at the end of 1945, following requests by German-speaking teachers: the results are separate schools for each language group with instruction in the pupils' mother tongue. The attempts on the Italian side to create "bilingual schools or at least to make the division between Italian and German schools less drastic" (Baur/Mezzalira/Pichler 2008: 53 [authors' translation]) made in the following years and decades were never successful. Second language (L2) teaching, Italian or German respectively, was made compulsory as early as 1945. However, between 1947 and 1972, while Italian schools were lifted from the mandatory teaching of the L2, the teaching of German continued but was entrusted to non-German-speaking teachers. Conversely, in German schools Italian was taught by Italian-speaking teachers. With the second Statute of Autonomy of 1972, instruction of the L2 "by teachers for whom this language is also their mother tongue" (Art. 19 in Giunta 2009: 75 [authors' translation]) was reintroduced as mandatory for both primary and secondary Italian schools.

It is interesting to note that the proposal by the Minister of Public Education Vincenzo Arangio-Ruiz (12 December 1944 – 8 December 1945) to set up communal school canteens for German and Italian children at least in the villages, if not in the largest towns in South Tyrol, was never followed. The idea of bringing Italian and German children together so that they could "develop a feeling of union" to "overcome the differences between the ethnic groups" (Arangio-Ruiz in Baur/Mezzalira/Pichler 2008: 55 [authors' translation]) was never implemented and it was not until 2014 that Motion no. 25/13 by the Greens was approved. Thanks to this Motion, the provincial council is now charged with "adopting, as a guideline for new school infrastructures [...], the creation of common school buildings for both language groups, in order to facilitate constant and daily contact between children and young people from both language groups" [authors' translation].

Consequently, meeting people from the other language group and practising and learning the second language outside of school in a natural environment is quite rare, as will be explained later. Hence, it is not surprising that there have been reports of an unsatisfactory level of bilingualism for decades, mostly in the press (cf. Laner 2007; Marchiodi 2011), often with reference to the percentage of citizens passing the bilingualism exam, but less in scientific publications due to insufficient empirical data. The first study to have gathered robust empirical evidence showing that bilingualism in South Tyrolean schools is neither sufficient nor widespread is

Kolipsi I (cf. Abel/Vettori/Wisniewski 2012) followed by Kolipsi II (cf. Vettori/Abel 2017). The purpose of the project was to measure the level of competence in the second language, Italian or German, of a representative sample of Italian- and German-speaking pupils enrolled in the fourth year of all upper secondary schools in the Province of Bolzano.⁷ Alongside the linguistic component, the study also investigated and analysed the psycho-social and sociolinguistic aspects that most influence the approach to, and the acquisition of, the L2 in South Tyrol.

2.1 Bilingualism among young people in South Tyrol

In both rounds of the Kolipsi project, a representative sample of fourth year upper secondary school pupils (average age 17 years) underwent tests to elicit their L2 competence and filled in an online questionnaire that allowed the authors to collect metadata that reveal, among other things, the students' the linguistic habits, their experiences, motivational drives and much more. As in the first project (cf. Abel/Vettori/Wisniewski 2012), in the most recent study (cf. Vettori/Abel 2017) the pupils took a written production test consisting of two exercises/stimuli, one narrative and the other argumentative. They also took a listening comprehension and a lexical competence test. All the tests used are standardised and directly refer to the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, considering that the target level leaving upper secondary school is B2. Conclusions drawn about the pupils' skills refer in particular to the written production test, which was evaluated in both projects by a team of specially trained assessors.

South Tyrolean secondary school pupils have a rather mediocre knowledge of their L2 and the comparison between the two studies shows a further decrease in their skills. When comparing the results for the target language Italian (Figure 1), the second study (school year 2014/2015) shows a clear downward shift in skills towards the A2 level. While in the first Kolipsi study (school year 2007/2008) the core areas of competence ranged between B1 (46 %) and B2 (41.1 %), in the new study B1 remains the most represented level (52 %), but the A2 share has grown considerably (20 %), so much so that it is almost on a par with the B2 level (21.7 %).

⁷ The project focused explicitly on pupils with German and Italian as a first language and not on Ladin pupils.

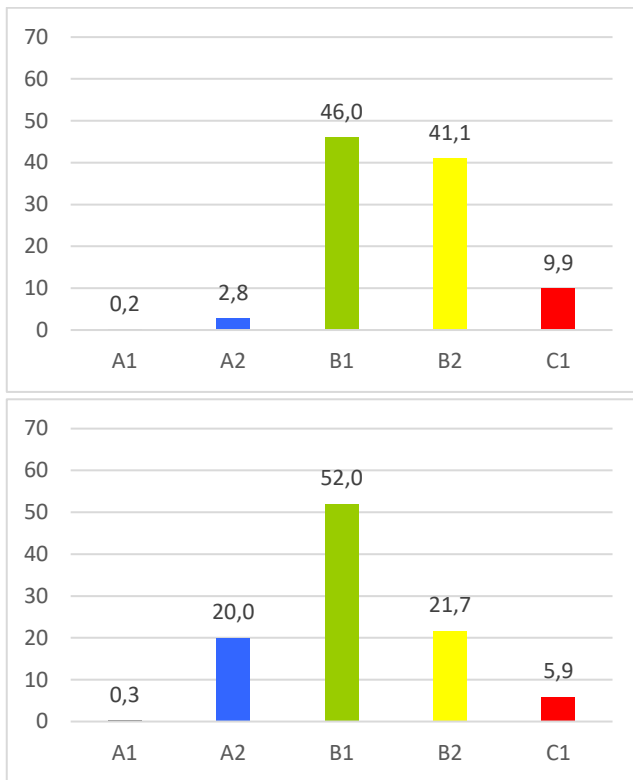


Figure 1: Kolipsi I (school year 2007/08; N: 1,029) vs. Kolipsi II (school year 2014/15; N: 1,148). Results (in percent) of the written test (task 1) for Italian L2

A comparison of the results for the target language German (Figure 2) also shows a decrease in competences. The trend is more limited, but the starting point in Kolipsi I was already rather low. The most frequent level in Kolipsi I was B1 (50.2 %), followed by A2 (29.1 %), while in Kolipsi II the most frequently represented level is A2 (36 %), followed by B1 (34.5 %) and A1 (9.8 %). The percentage of pupils with B2 and higher skills has remained almost the same (20 % versus 19.8 %).

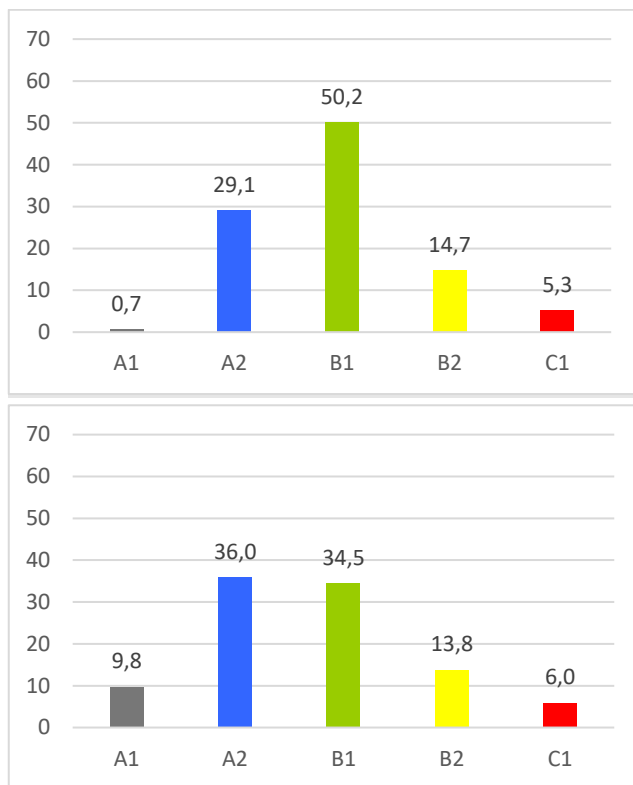


Figure 2: Kolipsi I (school year 2007/08; N: 285) vs. Kolipsi II (school year 2014/15, N: 420). Results (in percent) of the written test (task 1) for German L2

As mentioned above, school is the main location for L2 learning and practice in South Tyrol. For this reason, the results can only disappoint, especially since they are the outcome of 12 years' worth of L2 learning for a total of about 2,000 hours of teaching; this figure does not include any additional hours, which are difficult to quantify, related to early learning adopted in nursery schools and to the language enhancement activities mainly carried out in the Italian language schools (Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and non-CLIL initiatives). An in-depth analysis of the data from the second study allowed us to identify the “private” use of the L2 outside the school context as a strong predictor of good L2 skills for both Italian- and German-speaking pupils. In the first case, the use of the L2 outside school and a good (self-assessed) knowledge of the South Tyrolean dialect, which is the language variant used by the German-speaking population in almost all domains, predict better skills in German. In the case of German-speaking pupils, it is the extracurricular use of the L2 and the frequency of contact with the closest person of the other group (i.e. the person from the other group with whom a close relationship has been established) that predict better skills in Italian (cf. Vettori/Abel 2017: 135–138). For predictors to work both on a large scale and on a small number of teenagers, contact should be extensive and frequent, which, according to the data in our possession, is not the case. Eighty percent of the sample of the second study (N: 1,260) has very few to no friends from the other language group and only a mere

16 % has some/many friends (ibid.: 105, Table 13).⁸ As was to be expected given their distribution in South Tyrol, half of the German-speaking sample states that they do not have any Italian-speaking friends; very few have some/many friends (13 %). The same applies to the frequency of contact with L2 friends, which in 33.2 % of cases is limited to once a week and in 26 % of cases to no contact at all (cf. ibid.: 158, Table 68).⁹

Obviously, the difficulty of meeting Italian-speaking peers in the valleys makes the situation more difficult for German-speaking pupils. However, the majority of upper secondary schools are located in Bolzano, Merano, Bressanone and Brunico, where the Italian community is well represented, albeit in different numbers. The data presented so far speaks to the strength of the South Tyrolean separatist system, and to an ambivalent and contradictory attitude towards bilingualism. “Factors including social, attitudinal, educational, and historical considerations, primarily determine the nature of [social] bilingualism. For instance, in some societies (e.g., India) bilingualism is valued and receives positive evaluation and, thus, is encouraged, eventually leading to stable and natural bilingualism. In other societies, however, bilingualism is seen as a negative and divisive force” (Bhatia 2018). While it is true that in order to work in a public institution, it is compulsory to pass a bilingualism exam (the “patentino”) or to present a certificate attesting the level of competence in both languages, and that the business world has recently backed a plan for a European school to educate the children of foreign professionals and to improve the multilingual skills of, at least, some South Tyrolean pupils (cf. Campostrini 2020), the German-speaking community continues to fear the assimilation of the German language of South Tyrol into the Italian group.

2.2 Fear, prejudice and possible answers: some interim conclusions

The legacy of the struggles suffered during the years of Fascism resulted in a natural fear on the part of the German-speaking group of being assimilated into the Italian group. During the 1970s, a number of scientific studies contributed to the fear that the German language would dwindle and eventually succumb. “Despite the fact that the scientific community had tried to play down [...] the debate on the weakness of the German language in South Tyrol, the discussion on these issues, instead of stopping, continued [...] so much so that in the following decades the discussions on the ‘linguistic emergency’ were periodically rekindled” (cf. Baur/ Mezzalira/Pichler

⁸ The percentages here refer only to German- and Italian-speaking pupils and not to the German/Italian bilingual ones, so the cumulative percentages shown do not correspond to those in the above-mentioned publication.

⁹ Cf. footnote 8.

2008: 134–135 [authors’ translation]). The battleground is almost always that of the education system. Proposals for “language immersion” or for the creation of “bilingual schools” – without however specifying in detail a commonly accepted model – inevitably provoke reactions of closure on the German side. An example are the words of the previous president of the province, Luis Durnwalder, who, interviewed in September 2007 about language immersion, declared that “bilingual schools, or better, where, to give an example, mathematics in German and history in Italian are taught, frightens (*sic.*) us: it would be the end of the German minority” (Brannick 2016: 168). Another example is the very recent words of the vice spokeswoman for youth, a member of the right-wing party Südtiroler Freiheit: “A multilingual school leads to an increasing (voluntary) assimilation to (*sic.*) Italian. It is gradually instilled into the pupils that Italian is ‘normal’ in South Tyrol, even though the culture in German-speaking South Tyrol has never been Italian. Young people will not critically question this fact and Italian will become a habit until South Tyrol becomes an ordinary Italian province. This is precisely the danger we as South Tyroleans have to beware of” (VOX NEWS Südtirol 2019).

So far there is no historical evidence to support these fears: the latest census data from 2011 shows the German language group to be stable (with a slight increase, +0.26 % compared to 2001) while the Italian group is slightly decreasing (-0.41 %; ASTAT 2012: 4-5). As for German language competences, the fact that Kolipsi data show decreasing Italian competences on the part of German-speaking pupils certainly does not provide arguments in favour of a possible assimilation trend. Quite the opposite, it seems that the distance between the two groups has become greater. Given that intergroup contact and the subsequent L2 use outside the school context have been shown to be predictors of good language skills, encouraging contact between the two groups could reduce this distance and the fear that contributes to prejudice against the outgroup. According to Allport (1954), who defines prejudice as “a product of fear, ignorance, hierarchy or a lack of shared life patterns and goals” (Paluck/Green/Green 2019: 133), contact between groups that are different in religion, ethnicity, language or other can, under certain conditions,¹⁰ be an engine of change towards stereotyped or prejudiced attitudes. Direct contact is thought to diminish prejudice by “(1) enhancing knowledge about the outgroup, (2) reducing anxiety about intergroup contact, and (3) increasing empathy and perspective taking” (Pettigrew/Tropp 2008: 922). In their influential review of more than 500 studies on the effects of intergroup contact, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) concluded, thanks to the evidence provided by their meta-analysis, that intergroup contact can promote reductions in intergroup prejudice, but also that “Allport’s conditions are

¹⁰ Allport’s four conditions for optimal intergroup contact are: equal group status within the situation, common goals, intergroup cooperation and authority support.

not essential for intergroup contact to achieve positive outcomes” (Pettigrew/Tropp 2006: 766). In a recent paper, Paluck and colleagues evaluated “the state of contact hypothesis research from a policy perspective” (Paluck/Green/Green 2019: 129): their meta-analysis confirms Pettigrew and Tropp’s conclusions that contact generally reduces prejudice but neither confirms nor denies that Allport’s conditions are not necessary to generate a positive change in attitudes, and this because of the “lack of experiments that systematically test the moderating impact of these conditions on prejudice reduction” (ibid.: 153).

In light of this, promoting contact between German- and Italian-speaking young people in South Tyrol certainly seems promising, but it requires the intervention of several players for it to help them overcome their mistrust of others and to become an opportunity to develop close relationships. Politicians and schools should further encourage existing exchanges between Italian and German schools and create situations where students engage in group activities to achieve a common goal through collaboration and collective decision-making. It is the task of politicians and schools to create spaces (cf. the above-mentioned Motion no. 25/13) and opportunities for the groups to meet – for example, twinning projects, trips/holidays, competitions – and to ensure that they are available to everyone, including poorer families. However, as the role of parents both in supporting their children in language learning (cf. Ng/Ng 2015; Noels/Adrian-Taylor/Saumure/Katz 2019) and influencing their attitudes towards the outgroup is well known (cf. Carraro/Forer/Paladino 2012; for a recent review see Miklikowska/Bohman/Titzmann 2019), it seems fair to expect an active role of South Tyrolean parents in promoting intergroup contact as well as L2 practice. Parents should support their children by encouraging them, where possible, to join sport clubs and cultural associations run and attended by members of the other language group. Moreover, they are also expected to be a living example of bilingualism, which means trying to interact in L2 with people and acquaintances from the other group and encouraging their children to do the same.

3 The new advances

In 1972, when the Second Statute of Autonomy was approved, local authorities could not have foreseen that within twenty years South Tyrol, as the rest of Italy, would begin to be affected by a slow but steadily increasing number of migrants attracted to the numerous economic opportunities that this alpine region offers. In 1999, the total number of resident foreigners with non-Italian citizenship stood at just over 2.5 % of the population. Twenty years later, the percentage has risen to 9.6 %, slightly over the national average of 8.8 % (cf. IDOS: 2020). As of 31 December 2019, people from 138 countries live in South Tyrol. Around 55.9 % of the approximately 10,000 non-Italian pupils attending school and nursery school (aged

3 to 19) in South Tyrol were born in Italy (ibid.). Neither national nor local authorities provide data based on languages when it comes to migration (a linguistic census presents many difficulties, after all). However, the number of nationalities can give us an idea of how the linguistic landscape of the region has changed. The data collected within the project *Sprachenvielfalt macht Schule – One-school, many languages* (SMS)¹¹ provide a picture of linguistic diversity in schools: 34 % of 2,463 students aged 8 to 19, who took part in the didactic activities proposed in schools where either the German or the Italian language was the medium of instruction, declared that they speak and understand a language other than German, Italian, English and the South Tyrolean dialect (Colombo/Barrett/Engel 2020). Besides German, Italian and Ladin, languages such as Chinese, Urdu, Russian, Arabic and Albanian have now become part of an increasingly linguistically heterogeneous puzzle. Italy's northernmost province is witnessing an increase in its diversity as a result “of the social and cultural changes derived from globalisation, geographical and social mobility” (Ruiz de Zarobe/Riuz de Zarobe 2015: 395).

The education system was among the first to be affected by the presence of a new form of multilingualism. Italian-speaking schools have seen a considerable increase in the presence of pupils with a migrant background since the early 1990s, while German-speaking schools began to witness the phenomenon some ten years later, in the early 2000s (Gramegna/Niederfriniger in press). However, these chronological differences are not the only explanation for the different approaches to multilingualism that have characterised (and still characterise) both Italian- and German-speaking schools. The former have only recently started to deal with language diversity, as understood by the Council of Europe (2016), by taking into account the different languages present in class between teachers and pupils with the aim of designing a truly multilingual and intercultural curriculum. In 2016, the latter, based on experience in schools that have shown little lasting or widespread impact, launched the “Multilingual Curriculum South Tyrol” (Schwienbacher/Quartapelle/Patscheider 2016).

The first joint action between school boards of the three language groups dates back to 2007, when a “project was launched between the language groups to create centres to promote the integration of pupils with a migrant background” (Beschluss der Landesregierung Nr. 1482, 7. Mai 2007). In 2012, the SMS project was the first to witness a collaboration between researchers and representatives of the three main language groups.

¹¹ <https://sms-project.eurac.edu/>

Some years ago, in 2012, a preliminary study within the SMS project outlined pupils' and teachers' new plurilingualism and their language practices in class, revealing an ever-increasing language diversity. Students, teachers, school principals and, to a lesser extent, parents at South Tyrolean lower secondary schools took part in the study. The results show that teachers of all subjects have a different attitude towards old and new languages. A positive and open-minded attitude was identified: 48 % of teachers in German-speaking schools and 63 % in Italian-speaking schools see plurilingualism positively (cf. Zanasi/Colombo/Engel 2017). In relation to linguistic diversity at school, one third of the statements of the respondents from German- and Italian-speaking schools take a positive stance towards multilingualism ("a treasure", "an enrichment"), while another third are ambivalent ("it is reality", "it is a challenge") (ibid.). In the remaining third, viewpoints change between teaching staff from the two main language groups. In German-speaking schools, teachers regard the phenomenon negatively ("it is a problem", "it is a complication"), while their colleagues in Italian-speaking schools do not (ibid.). Moreover, in most cases plurilingualism is still associated with German, Italian and English, while "new languages" are neglected and only rarely find their place in everyday teaching practice (cf. Engel/Hoffmann 2016).

3.1 Plurilingual family members in South Tyrol

The ambivalent attitude of teachers towards new forms of multilingualism in class and the ever-increasing number of initiatives that not only school boards, but also single schools of both language groups launch and sustain to help teachers, school principals and professionals to manage and enhance multilingualism at school¹² do not seem to be reflected in society yet (cf. Engel/Colombo 2018). In this paragraph we will present the data collected within the European project *Talking about languages and emotions at home* (in short Tales@home).¹³ From 2016 to 2018 staff from Eurac Research and other five partners located in Lithuania, Belgium, the United Kingdom and Italy interviewed members of multilingual families. The aim was to study the daily use of different languages at home, to understand the motivations for employing each language, to analyse beliefs about languages and to see how attitudes and emotions influence language learning and language maintenance within the family. In South Tyrol twelve multilingual families were interviewed. They are examples of both old and new forms of multilingualism and speak a total of fifteen languages and dialects. For each family, at least one adult and one child took part in the interview; each family member knew at least two languages; parents

¹² A detailed overview of projects and initiatives on multilingualism in South Tyrolean schools can be read in Engel/Colombo (2018).

¹³ <https://www.talesathome.eu/>

did not necessarily share the same native language (cf. Tuominen 1999). The great majority of the interviewed parents were plurilingual and spoke three or more languages. In *Tales@home* bilinguals are defined according to Valdez & Figueroa (1994: 21) as simply “knowing two languages” without taking into consideration any other aspects such as age of acquisition or proficiency level.

During the interviews, families were asked to talk about their family history, their linguistic repertoire (cf. Busch 2012, 2017), their language skills and frequency of language use in different settings of everyday family life (e.g., at the dinner table, during bedtime rituals). This last point is particularly important for the purposes of this article as it allowed the research team to reconstruct the linguistic profiles of the interviewees and thus their points of view on South Tyrolean multilingualism. The following examples are all taken from transnational families (see Curdt-Christiansen 2016; Lanza/Wei 2016) whose members were not born in South Tyrol and who, therefore, speak languages other than Italian, German or Ladin as their first language.

In the first example an adult shares her point of view on South Tyrolean society. She is a member of a British/German family and her L1 is English, which she always uses with her children and with her husband, while her L2 is Italian, which she speaks at work with colleagues. Prior to settling down in Bolzano, she had lived in other countries for long periods of time and her Italian improved while living in another Italian region, where both her children were born. Having married a German-speaking man, she is able to understand German, but admits to never speaking it. Her children, on the other hand, are German/English bilinguals with limited knowledge of the Italian language, as they themselves state during the interview.

Example 1: Interviews from *Tales@home* F12 00:03:42 – 00:04:10

I mean when I think what the perception is the Italian German perception is very negative towards each other, no? And I'm so shocked when people are blindly kind of blindly positive about me being English and they immediately say oh that is such an advantage that you speak English and I'm thinking well look at you what an advantage you have that you've got the possibility to speak German and Italian but they don't see that at all they just say English ah that's the global language or so there is that side that they seem to think that my that the fact that I know English is somehow greater valid than them being able to speak two languages.

The fact that the interviewee speaks English, which is defined as a global language, as her L1, plays a rather significant role in her relationship with South Tyrolean society. A person's feelings towards a society that speaks a different language is closely related to the person's L1. This concept is clearly stated in the words of the

interviewee, when she underlines the contrast between the way local society relates to her being an English native speaker, a “blindly positive” attitude, and how the Italian and German language groups relate to each other within the territory, seen as “very negative”.

Later in the same interview the woman expresses her point of view on the educational system in South Tyrol:

Example 2: Interviews from Tales@home F12 00:17:45 – 00:18:10

We are in Italy where is this school system that should be providing a perfectly balanced education of two languages? I mean it’s a tragedy it’s not shocking it’s a tragedy such a shame such a waste a waste of an opportunity and really seeing what has happened to them he was an Italian speaker and that is gone.

She expresses her disappointment in realising that her elder son, who attended nursery school in a monolingual Italian environment in Piedmont and who, at the age of 4, defined Italian as “my language”, now struggles with Italian in Bolzano, a town where 73.8 % of the population speaks Italian as L1 (ASTAT 2020). Her daughter faces the same struggle. Both her children are now fully immersed in a German-speaking environment, as her daughter admits in the same interview. When the interviewer asks the daughter to estimate how often she uses Italian in her everyday life, she replies “rarely” because:

Example 3: Interviews from Tales@home F12 00:07:24 – 00:08:12

Ja weil meine Freunde, die meisten meine Freunde sind eher in Südtirol geboren und dann reden sie Deutsch und die italienische Freunde würden eher so komisch finden wenn ich mit ihnen Italienisch rede und ich kann jetzt Italienisch auch nicht so gut.

[Yes because my friends, most of my friends were born in South Tyrol and then they speak German and the Italian friends would find it rather funny if I spoke Italian to them and I don’t speak Italian very well either.]

From the analysis of the Tales@home data, in particular data related to the linguistic profiles of persons representing the new forms of multilingualism, a very important fact emerges. Even though these people are aware that they cannot fully fit into the existing South Tyrolean language system, they are indirectly and nevertheless forced to choose between three language groups. In the excerpt above, the twelve-year-old daughter mentions that her everyday life takes place mainly within one language group and contacts with the other one are rare; when such contacts take place, they happen in German rather than Italian. Everyone in South Tyrol has the

opportunity to learn both German and Italian, but socialisation and daily life take place mainly within one language group, even for ‘newcomers’. This inevitably weakens the motivation to learn the language of the other group so as to get closer to it. This phenomenon can be found in other multilingual regions of Europe as well (e.g. the German-Danish border, see Pedersen 2007).

The next example gives clear evidence of this. The speaker is a mother of Serbian origin who fled her country in the mid-1990s and lived in several European countries before settling down in South Tyrol, where she now resides with her two children and her husband, who is also of Serbian origin. The family lives in a predominantly German-speaking village, but the two children, both born outside South Tyrol, attend the Italian school in the nearest town. At home, the family mainly speaks Serbian, while the children speak Italian to each other. The mother has a poor understanding of Italian because the Serbian community that welcomed her in South Tyrol introduced her to a German-speaking environment. In addition to Serbian and German, she speaks Croatian, English, and Greek.

Example 4: Interviews from Tales@home F02 00:14:09 – 00:14:35

Wie Italiano ich ehrlich ich möchte so lernen Italiano aber ich habe noch Angst so mit dem Zeit ich ja ich glaube ich ich werde lernen die Sprache in welche ich welche ich eh habe Kontakt jede Tag ist Polnisch, Rumänien, Slovakien, Albanien, Pakistanien das sind so verschiedene Sprache.

[Like Italian I honestly want to learn Italian but I’m still afraid like with the time I yes I think I will learn the language in which I which I have contact every day is Polish, Romania, Slovakia, Albania, Pakistania these are so different language]

Her willingness to learn Italian is clearly expressed. However, as she mainly speaks German at work and is immersed in a multilingual environment dominated by languages such as Urdu and Romanian, she does not feel the urgent need to learn Italian. In addition, when talking about Italian she also mentions fear, not so much of the learning process, but rather of not being able to speak it well enough due to its scarce use, as she points out later in the interview.

This feeling of not needing to learn both languages is also shared by other adults interviewed for Tales@home. They belong to households in which at least one parent was born and raised in South Tyrol. In this case, association with one or the other language group occurs more automatically. This is the case of a mother of Argentinian origin, whose L1 is Spanish, married to an Italian-speaking South Tyrolean. She lives in Merano, South Tyrol’s second largest city with an almost equal number of Italian and German speakers (cf. ASTAT 2020). At work she mainly

speaks Spanish and Italian. In her interview she states her interest in learning German, but talks about learning German as a plan for the future, when her children “are older”.

Example 5: Interviews from Tales@home F10 00:05:18 – 00:06:36

Io adesso da tanti anni che sono qua inizio a capire però no ma mi sono mai messa a studiare seriamente il tedesco è una lingua che mi piace tanto... penso che quando arriva il momento che loro crescono mi metto a studiare seriamente perché è una lingua che mi piace.

[I have been here for so many years now I am beginning to understand, but I have never started to study German seriously, it's a language I like so much ..., I think that when the time comes for them to grow up I will start to study seriously because it's a language I like]

However, there are also some exceptions. This is the case of a mother of Brazilian origin, whose L1 is Portuguese and L2 is French, which she learned at university in Brazil. She is a housewife, married to a German-speaking South Tyrolean, with two daughters attending a German-speaking school in an Italian environment in Bolzano. She admits that when she arrived in South Tyrol, her association with the Italian language group was almost natural, given the closeness of her languages to Italian. She barely understands German and the only contacts with this language group happen through her husband's family members.

Migration is a relatively recent and still ongoing phenomenon in South Tyrol (cf. Meçe 2016) but it is true that “multilingualism generates plurilingualism when individuals interested in communicating across their boundaries learn the other population's language and thus become bridges between their respective groups” (Mufwene 2017: 25). As explained in section 1 of the present article, South Tyrol has never been a monolingual region, even though the historical events of the last century have led to the establishment of a monolingual educational model, which has played and still plays a role in the separation of the two major language groups in local society. However, what emerges from the Tales@home interviews is that this division involves newcomers as well. On the one hand, there is a still prevailing notion of multilingualism that is not understood in an all-encompassing sense (cf. Coste/Moore/Zarate 2009), neither by the educational world nor by society in general. Priority is still given to the knowledge of either the local languages or English, “the global language”, at the expense of other languages that enjoy less prestige at macro and micro levels. On the other hand, the multilingual turn (cf. May 2014) in society clashes with the daily reality of single individuals: they may have a positive attitude towards local language diversity, but nonetheless tend to fit in with one or the other group.

4 Towards a multilingual South Tyrol: challenges and proposals

In this article we shed light on the sociolinguistic situation and language policy in South Tyrol and on some socio-demographic changes that are shaking the foundations of the existing language and educational system of the region.

The road towards multilingualism in South Tyrol has been a bumpy one: at first the focus was on minority protection, which primarily guarantees the right to use one's mother tongue (cf. Giunta 2009, Art. 19.) and, in principle, strengthens monolingualism and promotes (German-Italian) bilingualism (partly also including trilingualism with Ladin) as a legal necessity only (see also Alber 2012). Individual bilingualism enables institutional multilingualism; this again cements the right to use the mother tongue or, more precisely, monolingual behaviour in public institutions. The linguistically divided school system paved the way to implementing requirements – that are comprehensible from a historical and legal point of view – through a corresponding language education, i.e. through an education mainly in the mother tongue. Private life in many cases could and still can be lived in a quite monolingual manner, not least due to the demographic distribution in the region. As previously mentioned, voices expressing the wish for the language groups to really live together were raised early on. In this context, school and the discussion about bi- (and in part also tri-)lingual education has always played a crucial role. School was perceived and established as the central place for language learning. The choice of school steers children towards either a more German- or Italian-speaking world. Thus, choosing a school has far-reaching consequences, not only for language teaching. Socialisation within a mainly German- or Italian-speaking world lays the foundations for one's private and, later, professional network of people. At the same time, the choice of a school and socialisation within a group are relevant for maintaining a stable balance between the language groups, which again is decisive for job admission in public administration or for the allocation of subsidies. In the past few decades, language competences have been perceived as important not only in order to comply with legal requirements but, increasingly, as an essential factor for economic success (cf. e. g. Handelskammer 2014). Thus, the two main school systems have been devoting a notable amount of time and effort to second language tuition, particularly schools with Italian as a language of instruction. These have offered a considerable amount of “enhanced language teaching”, i.e. with up to 12

additional hours per week dedicated to L2 teaching, and, to a different extent, CLIL etc.¹⁴

In recent times, there have been increasing demands, chiefly from the economic sector, not only for a bilingual, but also for a multilingual school akin to the European School model (see e.g. Drescher 2020). These would offer classes in languages other than German and Italian, and especially in English. While the benefits of this model of language acquisition are undoubted, what the model promotes –as is the case of the foreign language focus typical of traditional school multilingualism – is “elite multilingualism”: “It is not plurilingualism in general that is seen as a cultural and social capital, but only certain languages and, thus, only their speakers are valued, while mastering other languages is not valued and honoured” (Krumm 2014: 27 [authors’ translation]). It should also be borne in mind that attending a European school is subject to high fees, which restricts access. Schools with extensive experience in CLIL-teaching in German and Italian, like-the elementary school “Manzoni” in Bolzano, mainly attract the educated middle class. In summary, European Schools and other bi- or multilingual models tend to target an educated elite and cannot therefore be considered truly inclusive models reflective of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the region or fully supportive of the multilingual repertoires of pupils in South Tyrol.

School in South Tyrol is committed, in principle, to bi- and multilingualism (cf. school framework guidelines: Deutsches Schulamt 2010; Intendenza scolastica italiana 2010). It aims at achieving language competences oriented towards the model defined in the CEFR (CEFR: 2001). In this action-oriented approach, users and learners are viewed as “social agents” who have to accomplish certain linguistic tasks (CEFR 2001: 9). This may involve all language domains, be they educational, professional private or public, and is indicative of a school seeking to prepare for a bi- and plurilingual life. Nevertheless, language competences, at least as far as German and Italian as L2 are concerned, are relatively low – and are even tending to decrease –, especially if considered against the backdrop of South Tyrolean efforts and institutional conditions.

If schools wish to prepare for a bi- and multilingual life that also takes place outside their own walls, language learning and language use cannot be restricted to school alone. Extra-curricular actors, not least parents, must be held responsible, as well. If, as shown above, contacts and friendships between German- and Italian-speaking people in South Tyrol have proven to be a predictor for good L2-competences, it is up to education policies, schools, and parents to create and expand opportunities for

¹⁴ This is mainly based on provincial law no. 5, 16/07/2008.

contact, exchange, pursuit of common goals and the creation of common heroes and myths. Such opportunities can certainly start at school, as this is the place where many friends are made. In this respect, it is noteworthy that the first building to host both a German and an Italian elementary school (A. Langer school, cf. Mattioli 2014) was opened only in 2014, thus increasing the chances of pupils from different language backgrounds to meet. It is also worth noting that this achievement, aimed at promoting exchange between language groups, had been on the wish list of the Italian school system for decades but is not at all mentioned on the website of the Italian school located in the building.¹⁵ Instead, the website of the German school located in the building gives explicit indications; the school profile even clearly states the importance of other languages and cultures alongside local ones.¹⁶ The construction of another, similar school with a communal canteen in Bolzano will follow in 2024 (cf. Pasquali 2021), some 80 years after the first demands for joint canteens were voiced (see above). In addition, parents act as a role model in, among other things, their attitudes and contacts with people from the other language group and in how they integrate the two languages into everyday life (cf. Vettori/Abel 2017).

On the one hand, South Tyrol already has longstanding experience in dealing with multilingualism, especially local bi- (or tri-)lingualism, and can show a range of positive approaches to the promotion of language competences (see above). On the other, the “South Tyrolean system” (with its legal framework, etc.) seems to stand in its own way as far as changes to multilingual education and multilingual everyday practice are concerned.

The established system appears to have already reached its limits with regard to bi- (and tri-) lingualism. Now it is increasingly being challenged by a ‘new’ multilingualism. More and more families are comprised of multilingual microcosms, not simply bilingual German-Italian ones. They seem to feel well accepted (from a linguistic point of view) provided they bring along what we called “elite multilingualism”, which would include a global language such as English. However, what also becomes clear is that multilingual families too sometimes integrate themselves either into the German- or in the Italian-speaking world for professional or private reasons and that they feel compelled to choose one of the local language environments and, consequently, a living environment, e.g. when they have to choose a school for their children. There is, in general, little space at school for family languages that do not fall within the usual range of school languages. In other words,

¹⁵ http://www.icbolzano2.it/?page_id=280

¹⁶ <https://www.ssp-bozeneuropa.com/index.php/de/grundschule-a-langer/zur-grundschule-a-langer>

despite the previously mentioned variety of approaches, such as the implementation of multilingual curricula, projects etc., pupils entering school are increasingly restricted to an “elite multilingualism” (Colombo/Stopfner 2018).

The school world as a whole has been following the CEFR in its framework guidelines for several years now (CEFR 2001). It may benefit from some of the recent CEFR developments as described in the so-called Companion volume (CEFR CV 2018) when aiming at including all the languages and varieties present at school (see e.g. Studer 2020: 3) and when promoting particular competences, such as those relating to mediation, which seem to be of particular relevance in a multilingual context. For the first time, the new Companion volume (CEFR CV 2018) develops descriptors and scales for the description of plurilingual competence, including the competence scale “Building on plurilingual repertoire” (CEFR CV 2018: 161, Studer 2020).

[...] The plurilingual approach emphasises the fact that as an individual person’s experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience), he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact (CEFR 2001: 4).

Furthermore,

[p]lurilingualism is presented in the CEFR as an uneven and changing competence, in which the user/learner’s resources in one language or variety may be very different in nature to those in another. However, the fundamental point is that plurilinguals have a single, inter-related repertoire that they combine with their general competences and various strategies in order to accomplish tasks (CEFR Section 6.1.3.2) (CEFR CV 2018: 28).

What is striking about these excerpts is that the entire plurilingual repertoire – including language varieties – is conceived as a complex resource of competences that can be used in multilingual communicative or mediation situations, whereby competences in single languages may be distributed to varying degrees (cf. Studer 2020: 10¹⁷).

¹⁷ See also Krumm 2014: 29 with respect to the value of partial/uneven language competences without, however, reference to the CEFR.

The competence scale “Building on plurilingual repertoire” (CEFR CV 2018: 161) contains some descriptors concerning codeswitching and the use of different languages during interaction. It also features placeholders like “different languages”, which can be replaced with the traditional school languages as well as, e.g. different L1s and dialectal varieties (cf. Studer 2020). The perception of dialectal varieties as a potential additional resource may be of particular relevance for the South Tyrolean context, as daily life outside of the classroom is largely determined by German dialectal varieties. Elsewhere, both the monolingual habitus and the demand for a perfect command of one of the dominant languages of South Tyrol are criticised (cf. Cennamo 2016: 131). The critique is also extended to a kind of double monolingual habitus, i.e. one in the German- and one in the Italian-speaking world (cf. Peterlini 2019: 211). However, the plurilingual repertoire approach may represent a change of perspective that will help remove the existing dichotomy and brings into focus new facets as competences, e.g. codeswitching or codemixing, which are considered normal in plurilingualism (cf. Krumm 2014: 29) and beneficial for communicative encounters and exchange.

Mediation, now finally available in the Companion volume of the CEFRS featuring competency scales and descriptors, is closely linked to plurilingual competence in the CEFR. (cf. CEFR CV 2018, for an overview Abel 2020). “In mediation, the user/learner acts as social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct meaning, sometimes within the same languages, sometimes from one to another (cross-linguistic mediation)” (CEFR CV2018: 103). Mediation activities are very diverse and can range from translating to explaining, note-taking, relaying information and to facilitating collaborative interaction. Again, placeholders are foreseen for any language and variety. The descriptors of the various activities can also be useful in making common linguistic practices in multilingual situations visible and in promoting them.

In South Tyrol, such a shift in perspective on language competences could serve as a starting point to think of or rethink a model for teaching and approaching the languages used in the region that is as inclusive as possible: it is not only native South Tyroleans who have to master German and Italian, but also ‘new’ South Tyroleans who speak other languages at home. Acknowledging individuals’ whole language repertoires would pave the way towards a more plurilingual and multilingual society.

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