

# Képzés és Gyakorlat

## Training & Practice

18. évfolyam, 2020/3–4. szám

## **Képzés és Gyakorlat**

A Szent István Egyetem Kaposvári Campus Pedagógiai Kar és  
a Soproni Egyetem Benedek Elek Pedagógiai Karának  
neveléstudományi folyóirata

*18. évfolyam 2020/3–4. szám*

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# **Képzés és Gyakorlat**

## **Training and Practice**

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**Volume 18, 2020 Issue 3-4.**

ARIANNA KITZINGER<sup>1</sup>**Interviewing Very Young Children on Multilingualism<sup>2</sup>**

*Interviewing is a usual research method in qualitative research which is widely used in pedagogy as well. Yet, interviewing very young children is rather rare as it carries special difficulties and researchers find it better not to overcomplicate the research process for the sake of potentially not useful material. While this might be true, it is worth focussing on the hardships and special features of this research technique, too. Therefore, the study shows the difference between interviewing children and adults, and at the same time, it also deals with a timely topic, multilingualism, which the present study will examine from the point of view of the kindergarteners. The originality of the study lies not in conducting interviews as a part of qualitative research but in the intention according to which the author wants to concentrate on this method, i.e. interviewing very young children (between 3 and 6) showing that it is a special job which demands more attention in educational linguistics.*

**1. Introduction***1.1 Background*

As long as Hungary belonged to the Soviet bloc, very few educational institutions welcomed foreign children. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, with the free movement of people, a special group of migrants<sup>3</sup> arrived in Hungary, the so-called "seconded personnel"<sup>4</sup> which in law means that their company or institutions send them into a foreign country for a special time limit (Csóka, 2001). Since September 2008 the children of foreign families working at the air base of Pápa have been going to the local Fáy András Kindergarten, which was appointed to be their host institution by the self-government of the town. Families came from NATO members and two Partnership for Peace nations in the frame of the Strategic Airlift Capability programme called SAC/C-17 (Strategic, 2013). Families are usually made up of young parents and their children who go either to school or to the kindergarten. Their delegation

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<sup>2</sup> This article was made in frame of the „EFOP-3.6.1-16-2016-00018 – Improving the role of research+development+innovation in the higher education through institutional developments assisting intelligent specialization in Sopron and Szombathely”.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Migrant’ is a legal term and as such has neither positive or negative connotation in this context. This fact is justified by the Pedagogical Programme of Fáy András Kindergarten where it appears 13 times (Morvai, 2008). The term is also used in every official documents (e.g. tenders) of the kindergarten.

<sup>4</sup> Another term for the same concept is “elite migrants” (Storr, 2017).

lasts approximately for 1,5-4 years. The multilingual-multicultural kindergarten in Pápa started to host 23 foreign families' children from 6 different countries and from the host country.

### *1.2 Research problem and questions*

The very complex question of how the actors of education form a common linguistic, cultural and pedagogical basis for communication in their very complex setting has already been examined (Kitzinger, 2015). Here I would like to concentrate on the children's side, i.e. how they see the multilingual routine in their family and kindergarten life. Therefore, the following major questions were asked as research questions:

- (1) What is the background to mother tongue and L2 in the family?
- (2) What kind of notions do children have about their foreign language speaking peers?
- (3) What kind of English language activities do children do in the kindergarten?

## **2. Literature review on migratory language education in Hungary**

In Hungary migrant children of mandatory school age must be provided with the suitable education. Forgács (2001) explains that the education should be free of charge, with a special stress on the language of the host country, moreover, migrant children's own language and culture should be familiarised as well. Besides, teachers should get special initial and in-service training. Although Council Directive 77/486/EEC (1977) prescribes the aforementioned rights for children from the European Union, the effect of the directive should be extended to the children of non-EU citizens, too, especially if they stay in the country for the reason of permanent work. Legally, migrant children should have the same rights and obligations and be treated equally at school. The author does not deal with children under 6, and he does not give a comprehensive answer to the question of the language of education either. He is convinced that migrant families send their children to the so-called "international schools" which are maintained by foreign states. As far as language is concerned, he mentions bilingual schools where the conditions of teaching Hungarian and a foreign language are already given. At this point the question arises which foreign languages are taken into consideration. The language problem of children with less widespread languages is absolutely neglected.

Simon (2009) cites the same source as Forgács (2001) and emphasises that according to Council Directive 77/486/EEC (1977) migrant children, regardless of their state of origin, should be integrated in a way that both their language and their culture could be preserved (Integrating, 2009). In Hungary, organising mother tongue tuition is within the scope of the country's own education system. It means that the country can choose the way of funding and

establishing L1 education. The integration policy of the European Union was refined in 2003 in Thessaloniki, where education and language teaching got into the limelight. Children can get direct integrated education within the majority classes, segregated education in special classes or they can take part in extra-curricular activities. How the teaching of the language of the host country is provided depends on the different educational traditions of the states. The examples range from the reception centres (United Kingdom) through school organised language courses (Czech Republic) to separated language teaching (Norway) or bilingual education (Sweden). Several countries (Denmark, Holland and Finland) support immigrant children's mother tongue education.

Vámos (2011) gives a comprehensive example of a Hungarian school, namely Tarczy Lajos Primary School, which is an interesting insight from our point of view as this school works under the direction of the self-government of Pápa, where our target institution, Fáy András Kindergarten works as well. The school operates on the basis of a Hungarian–English educational programme, which is mutually favourable both to foreign and Hungarian pupils, states the author. It is a very important point that this school has gained exempt from general legal rules and a unique permission was given in order to establish their own bilingual programme. The former Ministry of Education gave two main reasons for this:

- (1) foreign pupils' expectedly large fluctuation and
- (2) the principal task of teaching Hungarian to foreign pupils and teaching English as a common language.

In this sense the most accented areas of the bilingual pedagogical programme became as follows:

- (1) Foreign language command
- (2) Personality development
- (3) Intellectual attitude
- (4) Cognitive abilities
- (5) Mother tongue acquisition & cultural studies
- (6) European thinking

The slogan of the school became “meeting languages = meeting cultures” (Vámos, 2011, p. 203) which stimulates intercultural attitude among students. Similar goals can be observed in the programme of Fáy András Kindergarten (Morvai, 2008), too.

### 3. Research

#### 3.1 Context and participants

While interviewing students in primary and secondary schools is a usual method in language educational research, very young children (between 3 and 6) are rarely interviewed. As the present author considers children-centred education a key factor in pre-schools, interviewing children was a major factor of this study. Basically, the research is based on a linguistic aspect: it was vital to know what children know about languages, language use and the countries connected to languages. Questions were deliberately adjusted to their mental maturity.

The author tried to choose children for the interview, who she had already met during her previous observations in the kindergarten, but the original aims could not always be carried out as holidays and illnesses influenced the previous plans. In the end, kindergarten teachers' help had to be asked for in order to choose children who are available. Consequently, interviews with the following children could be conducted (Figure 1):

	Name (= pseudonym)	Age (years old)	Nationality	Group
1.	<b>Emily</b>	5	American	Old
2.	<b>Anastasiya</b>	4,5	Bulgarian	Old
3.	<b>Chessa</b>	3	American	Young
4.	<b>Csabi</b>	3	Hungarian	Young
5.	<b>Évi</b>	5	Hungarian	Middle
6.	<b>Bence</b>	4	Hungarian	Middle
7.	<b>Zita</b>	6	Hungarian	Old
8.	<b>Luca</b>	4	Hungarian	Old

**Figure 1. List of the interviewed children**

#### 3.2 Research design: the interview guide

The interviews with children were based on a pre-planned set of parallel questions in Hungarian and English. Originally, a semi-structured interview guide of 17 items was outlined which was completed with eight more items after piloting (Appendix). The following central themes were intended to be examined:

1. Languages & cultures (concepts, approaches):

- a) mother tongue
- b) foreign language
- c) countries and nationalities

## 2. Activities and relations (among children):

- a) linguistic
- b) social

The carefully structured interviews have been converted into less formal conversations, where it was not the previously planned questions that were literally asked, but the major topics were touched upon; often with supplementary remarks and questions. In this way, the outcome of some interviews was more similar to the think-aloud technique (Dörnyei, 2007; Brown & Rodgers, 2002) than to the semi-structured interviews. This shortcoming of the interview with the children could not be foreseen during piloting as the piloted interviewees belonged to the elder kindergarteners who managed to concentrate on the questions and did not tend to stray from the interview line to such an extent as the actual subjects of the interviews. The items were phrased in short and simple questions which focused on children's concrete and tangible experience instead of eliciting abstract opinions and views on sociolinguistic questions.

### *3.3 Methodology*

In comparison with what is described as interviewing methods (e.g. compiling the interview guide, using different tools and analysing results), very little is said about interview sampling strategies. In this respect, literature on research may be called defective. For instance, it soon turned out that interviewing children cannot be compared with interviewing adults with regard to several aspects (Figure 2). To solve the problems, the interviewer has to be much more creative with children. A lot of extra questions should lead the research to the actual items, which requires creativity and spontaneity. Flexibility is another key word: if the children feel more comfortable in their kindergarten teachers' or friends' company, the interview schedule has to be altered on the spot. A structured interview is deemed to failure: in the interview with kindergarteners the researcher has to give enough time and space so that children could tell their own thoughts and ideas, even if they are not in connection with the original questions of the interview. Researchers have to be especially inventive if they want to lead back the interview to its pre-planned course and avoid distraction.



Factors	Nature	Adults	Children	Solution
<b>Time</b>	attention span	long	short	short, simple questions
<b>Procedure</b>	conducting the interview	stimulating	boring, monotonous	interaction instead of interrogation
<b>Circumstances</b>	face-to-face	acceptable	unacceptable, disturbing	the presence of extra persons

Figure 2. Major differences between interviewing children and adults

### 3.4 Results

#### 3.4.1 Background to mother tongue and L2 in the family

Speaking about languages, Anastasiya illustrates her Bulgarian command with a Bulgarian word which means ‘cup’. Additionally, Emily mentions that she knows a few words in Bulgarian. She also informs me that ‘гъба’ means ‘mushroom’ and ‘Чао!’ means ‘Bye!’ in Bulgarian. Anastasiya understood the questions in English and also answered in English with an American accent: e.g. ‘talk’ [tɑ:k] or ‘because’ [bi’kɑ:z]. Both Emily and Anastasiya said that they understood Hungarian, but they preferred to answer in English:

*Interviewer: “Do you speak Hungarian?”*

*Emily: “Yes.”*

*Interviewer (switching into Hungarian): “Akkor mondd meg, honnan jöttél?”<sup>5</sup>*

*Emily: “From America.”*

Both Anastasiya and Emily talk about their friendship with pleasure. Emily says that they often meet either in their homes or in the kindergarten. When the interviewer asks them whether they speak Bulgarian, too, when they are together, Anastasiya gives a definitely negative answer. However, when the interviewer wants to know which language they prefer to use while playing, English or Hungarian, Emily replies: “*Hungarian and English.*” Chessa, the other American girl, also has a Hungarian friend in the kindergarten who speaks English, so they use the English language among themselves.

#### 3.4.2 Foreign language speaking children in the kindergarten

Most of the children are aware of the fact that there are children in their groups who speak languages different from Hungarian:

*Interviewer: “Do you know that there are children in your group who don’t speak Hungarian?”*

*Zita: “Yes, Anastasiya and Emily.”*

<sup>5</sup> “Then tell me where you are from?”

*Interviewer: “And where are they from?”*

*Zita: “From abroad.”*

*Interviewer: “From which country? For example, Emily?”*

*Zita: “From abroad.”*

*Interviewer: “And Anastasiya?”*

*Zita: “Bulgarian.”*

*Interviewer: “And Luboslaw?”*

*Zita: “Polish.”*

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*Interviewer: “Does everybody speak Hungarian in the kindergarten?”*

*Évi: “No. Not everybody.”*

*Interviewer: “Is there anybody who doesn’t?”*

*Évi: “Emily can speak Hungarian, too, but she’s not Hungarian, anyway.”*

Children have also observed that some of their foreign mates or their family members speak quite good Hungarian:

*Interviewer: “Where is Luboslaw from?”*

*Zita: “From Poland.”*

*Interviewer: “And what language does he speak?”*

*Zita: “Polish, but he already speaks very good Hungarian.”*

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*Bence: “I met Joseph in the thermal spa.”*

*Interviewer: “And how did you greet him?”*

*Bence: “In Hungarian.”*

*Interviewer: “Does he speak Hungarian?”*

*Bence: “He does. And so does his sister, Mandy.”*

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*Évi: “Mandy and Joseph’s mum can speak all kinds of things in Hungarian.”*

*Interviewer: “Did she learn Hungarian so well?”*

*Évi: “Yes, she did. So well that I thought she was Hungarian even if their children aren’t!”*

### *3.4.3 English language activities in the kindergarten*

As far as English language activities are concerned, children especially like to mention singing. Évi sings two songs without asking (“Jingle bells” and “One, two, three, four five...”) and she

hastily adds that she knows even more. Luca also starts singing the song “*Teddy bear...*” spontaneously:

*Interviewer: “That’s really nice. And what is this song about?”*

*Luca: “About a bear.”*

Some children mention different activities, e.g. children games in English:

*Interviewer: “What do you like doing best in English?”*

*Évi: “Hide-and-seek.” [Then she tells me the rules.]*

*Interviewer: “And what is English about it?”*

*Évi: “Well, it’s an English game.”*

*Interviewer: “Don’t you play hide-and-seek in Hungarian as well?”*

*Évi: “No!”*

#### **4. Conclusion**

According to the results, friendship, i.e. interactions between children may determine their language choice. In another part of the interview it was easy to discover that the American and Bulgarian families were friends who regularly met in their homes as well. It means that their families’ common language, English, became the children’s common language as well.

While children get information about different languages, they are not always able to name and differentiate them. They also have some notions about countries, but these notions are simplified into “home” and “abroad”. They can also make a difference between languages and citizenship, therefore they know that there are people who are not Hungarian but can speak the Hungarian language well. At the same time, children, due to the multilingual circumstances do meet people who speak different languages, i.e. they use different codes during their daily conversations. In this way, multilingualism has already become natural for them.

From among language activities in the kindergarten, according to the interviews, songs and games play the most important roles. It is interesting, however, that activity is before language, i.e. not the language but the activity catches children. It has an advantageous point as well, for instance, children can acquire a L2 without conscious knowledge. By this point we arrived at the question of acquisition and learning, which is beyond the scope of this short study.

As far as the research technique is concerned, in spite of all the drawbacks, it is useful to consider Pinter & Zandian’s (2014) point of view according to which it is neither worth falling back nor underestimating the relevance of the interviews with children, because they can have several benefits due to the interviewees’ original viewpoints and their age-appropriate way of

thinking. With this study the author wants to draw attention to interviewing the youngest and give an example to future researchers in this unexploited area.

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## APPENDIX

*Interview guide for all children*

	<b>magyar</b>	<b>English</b>
1.	Te magyarul beszélsz?	Do you speak English?
2.	Itt mindenki magyarul beszél?	Does everybody speak English here?
3.	X milyen nyelven beszél?	What language does X speak?
4.	X honnan jött?	Which country is X from?
5.	Tudod, hol van ... (X országa)?	Do you know where ... is?
6.	Voltál már ott?	Have you been there?
7.	Voltál már külföldön?	Have you been abroad?
8.	Ott milyen nyelven beszéltél?	How did you speak there?
9.	Szoktál X-szel játszani?	Do you play with X?
10.	Kikkel szeretsz játszani?	Who do you like to play with?
11.	Kik a barátaid?	Who is your friend?
12.	Y-nal (más nemzetiségű gyerek) nem játszol?	Don't you play with Y?
13.	Megértitek egymást?	Do you understand each other?
14.	Milyen nyelven beszéltek?	Which language do you speak?
15.	Szeretsz angolul beszélni?	Do you like speaking English?
16.	Megérted, ha X mond neked valamit angolul?	Do you understand if X says something to you in English?
17.	Mi az az angol nyelv?	What is that English language?
18.	Kik szoktak angolul beszélni? Melyik országban?	Who speaks English? Where?
19.	Csak az angolok beszélnek angolul?	Do only English people speak English?
20.	Te mit szeretsz a legjobban csinálni angolul?	What do you like to do in English best?
21.	Szoktál angolul játszani? És énekelni? Beszélni?	Do you play in English? Do you sing in English? Do you speak English?
22.	Hogyan kell angolul beszélni?	How do we have to speak English?
23.	Milyen nyelveket ismersz még?	Which other languages do you know?
24.	Melyik nyelven szeretsz jobban játszani: magyarul vagy angolul?	Which language do you prefer playing: in Hungarian or in English?