Teaching Core and Language in Bilingual Settings

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The challenge for students with CCN, who are in kindergarten or at school surrounded by languages other than their mother tongue, is not to be underestimated: These children have to learn two languages simultaneously, as well as their AAC system(s). Often either their AAC system is based on the national language and they cannot use it at home, or the AAC system is based on the mother tongue and they have no equivalent in kindergarten or at school (Soto & Yu 2014). This challenge concerns a huge group of bilingual students in countries with a long immigration history like USA, Canada, or Australia (English-Spanish, English-Chinese, English-French, English-Korean…) as well as many European countries with increasing immigration from East European countries and Middle East refugees (Robillard et al. 2014, Soto & Yu 2014). “Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) service providers are increasingly serving a significant number of clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds [...] We … argue for the support of both languages needed by the child to fully participate in his or her communicative environments” (Soto & Yu 2014, 83).

Current research projects (Boenisch & Soto 2015, Robillard et al. 2014) confirm the meanwhile well-known impact of core vocabulary not only for mother tongue students, but also for bilingual learners. Although core vocabularies share similarities in the different languages, they are far from identical on the word level, how the core words are used and combined in the different languages.

Accordingly, the communication aids need to represent the core words and, to provide language specific materials, these core words need to be organized in a way that supports the combination with other words in the specific language. Additionally fast changes between the languages need to be possible for code switching like “in the Kühlschrank” (Schmidt & Sachse 2015).

In this presentation, similar, yet language specific English and German low- and high-tech communication aids will be introduced as an example for a coherent bilingual AAC system (Schmidt & Sachse 2015, Sachse, Wagter & Schmidt 2013, Boenisch & Sachse 2009). The core vocabulary on these AAC systems was selected based on current research data on German and English language use (Boenisch & Soto 2015, Boenisch 2014). Even though the vocabulary and the design are very similar in organization and vocabulary, the materials differ in language specific characteristics (e.g. verbs, grammar). The parts of speech are positioned according to the word order in simple declarative sentences: “I want to drink some milk” (as opposed to “Ich möchte etwas Milch trinken”). With this word order in the reading direction from left to right and several parts of speech displayed at all times, first communicative attempts (single symbol utterances) can easily be expanded (Schmidt & Sachse 2015). By using a couple of language stimulation strategies like adding a symbol/word after, not before the original utterance, we can support the students’ development (i.e. “more” – “more milk”). Language skills on the several languages are a tremendous help for the intervention as examples that work in both languages can be provided both for the students but also for the family members (“mehr” – “mehr Milch”). But also differences can be highlighted (... “drinking milk” vs. “Milch trinken”). The communication aids, in particular the wallpaper with Velcro symbols can
serve not just as a tool for modeling language for the AAC users, but also as a language visualization tool (showing sentence strips as used in second language learning).

First experiences with the bilingual materials help understand the differences between these tools as communication aids and language learning tools (also used in foreign language classes at school for all students) as well as the need for more language learning materials that fit the structures, ideas and basics of the communication aids. Coherent communication and language learning support materials are especially important for children with CCN that are just starting to learn the language spoken at kindergarten or school.

*It is one of the goals of this workshop to discuss the language learning and teaching possibilities while using linguistically built communication systems. We will offer a reading activity with core vocabulary in two languages, incorporate modeling activities and use a cooperative learning approach to gather information on the topic of ‘wallpaper use and purposes in the multilingual classroom’.*

*Learning outcomes: How to design bilingual communication systems that incorporate language specific characteristics? A simple translation of one AAC system into another language does not work! Recognize the impact of links between the languages at bilingual AAC systems. How to start teaching a second language with students who need AAC?*

**References**


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Program Planner/Instructional Personnel’s Name: Stefane Kalén Sachse

Course Title: Teaching Core and Language in Bilingual Settings

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Program Planner/Instructional Personnel’s Name: Lena Schmidt

Course Title: Teaching Core and Language in Bilingual Settings

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