

Ethnic minorities and linguistic integration at primary schools in Germany

1. Theme

Since 2015, the number of newly arriving immigrants in Germany, especially from Middle Eastern countries, is rising. At school, partially segregating integration classes were created offering basic language support in German and leading into regular classes after maximally two years (Dewitz, Terhart & Massumi 2018). The heritage languages (Polinsky 2018) of many of these children differ from the official languages of their country of origin. They are not part of the school curriculum.

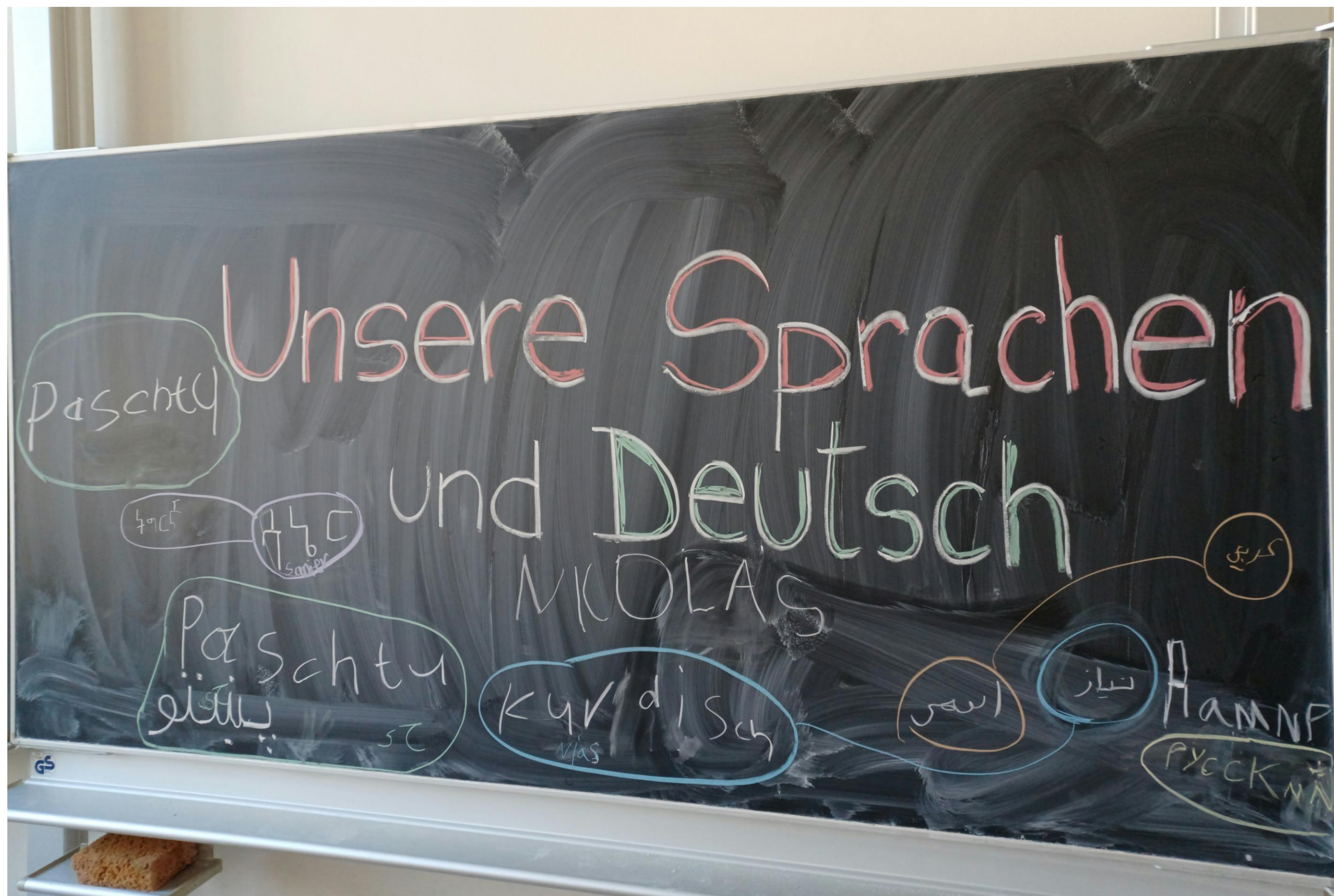
For the success of such forms of teaching, it is important to know what newly immigrated families themselves think of their heritage languages and other languages that played a role in their migration biographies. The project focuses on attitudes of children and their parents towards their respective languages and their future in Germany. At the same time, language development of the children in all their languages is documented.

2. Description

The role of heritage languages in the integration process of immigrants is still a debated issue. While the New Assimilation Theory claims that heritage languages do not support the integration process into the host society, the Theory of Segmented Assimilation (Portes et al. 2009) attributes to them a positive effect. Therefore, countries of immigration tend to integrate these languages into the education system (heritage language education), often supplemented by private initiatives of the communities or religious institutions (Mckay & Hornberger 2010, Kempert et al. 2016, Brehmer & Mehlhorn 2018). In addition to this model, a general sensitivity towards children's multilingualism is promoted in teacher education, encouraging strategies of translanguaging even in regular German lessons.

The controversy usually focuses on languages that are at the same time the official languages of the home countries. Minority languages like Kurdish in Turkey, Romanes in Serbia or Berber in Morocco usually are not taken into account. Research in this area shows (Brizić 2006, 2007, Brizić & Hufnagl 2016, Leseman et al. 2009) complex effects of these 'hidden languages': Sometimes, they are the first to be given up, in other cases, they are privileged by strategies of language maintenance. Research on asylum seekers and their children in Germany focuses on life conditions and future perspectives, but not language (Eisenhut 2015). Therefore, an integrated longitudinal approach was developed, consisting of two parts:

1. The study of the linguistic development of pupils from Middle Eastern countries in German and the heritage languages is supposed to shed light on the pace of German language acquisition and tendencies of language maintenance or shift with respect to heritage and transit languages.
2. Semi-structured, guided interviews with the children and their parents will document attitudes and experiences as minorities in the country of origin and Germany and future perspectives with a focus on languages: how do they position themselves in relation to their languages in Germany and how these orientations develop during the first two years. The first results of the project will be presented on the basis of case studies.



3. Material and Methodology

Interviewing children developed as a major issue in childhood studies (Heinzel 2008, Delfos 2008, Trautmann (2010). Some common methods of qualitative interviews designed for adult research subjects are not suitable for children. Against this background, our study chose a child-specific strategy for conducting interviews, which is also reflected in the design of the guideline. The interviews were conducted with the children first and their parents afterwards. Sometimes, the children were present during the parent interview, but not the other way round. The interviews are repeated one year later. Data analysis is realised by qualitative content analysis according to Mayring (2010).

Language development is documented in a picture story (VASE-Test) and a vocabulary test (developed by ourselves on the basis of first year school vocabulary) on three measurement points. The analysis focuses on the acquisition of German syntax, noun phrase and verb morphology and narrative development. Corresponding analyses for the heritage languages (Dari/Farsi, Pashtu, Kurmanji and Italian) were developed by the research team.

References:

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4. Results or intermediate Results

The results of the interviews with the families with respect to language attitudes show the following perspectives:

- Heritage language is considered important and part of identity, but no activities of language maintenance are pursued
- Acquisition of German and Development of a stable perspective in Germany is preferred (languages of origin might hinder the successful learning of German)
- Heritage language is considered important and part of identity and should be taught in school

Perspectives in Germany:

- Children and parents hold high professional aspirations, but are not aware of the school level necessary therefore
- Children and parents do not differ in their future perspectives, parents sometimes declare that the children themselves have to decide
- Children and parents agree in the preference of cultural values (respect of older generation, gratefulness of Children and feeling of responsibility for the family as whole) over individual personal success

5. Discussion / Output

1. How does heritage language education affect (a.) the acquisition of the language of instruction, (b.) success in education, (c.) overall social integration?
2. What is the position of newly arrived linguistic minorities on the issue of preservation of their first/heritage languages (which are not official languages in the home country)? Which factors can objectively contribute to the success of their full integration in the various spheres of life?
3. What is the contribution of the legal (A1 sub-project) study on the role of languages of origin of minorities and their importance for the educational integration of migrant children in Europe (e.g. Kurdish education for Turkish citizens in Germany)? How can corresponding programs be designed legally?