

Durch Zweisprachigkeit schneller ans Ziel?

Zu Leseverständnis und Lexikonerwerb
bi- und monolingualer Deutschlerner der schwedischen Oberstufe

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Akademisk avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i tysk språkvetenskap vid Göteborgs universitet, som med tillstånd av humanistiska fakultetsnämnden, kommer att offentligens försvaras fredagen den 29 april 2011, kl. 13.00, i sal T302, Olof Wijksgatan 6, Göteborg.



**GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
INST FÖR SPRÅK OCH LITTERATURER**

Abstract

Ph.D. dissertation at Gothenburg University, Sweden, 29 April 2011

Title: Durch Zweisprachigkeit schneller ans Ziel? Zu Leseverständnis und Lexikonerwerb bi- und monolingualer Deutschlerner der schwedischen Oberstufe

English title: Are bilinguals better foreign language learners? A study of Swedish bi- and monolingual high school students learning German with focus on reading comprehension and vocabulary learning

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ISBN: 978-91-628-8289-1

This thesis provides an analysis of bilingual immigrant high school students learning their first year of German as a foreign language (L3, L4, L5 etc.) and compares them with a monolingual control group, with the aim of discovering whether they differ with respect to their reading comprehension, vocabulary learning and used lexical inferencing strategies. Additionally, it reports on individual differences (e.g. previous amount of foreign language learning, level of motivation and socio-economic status) and how these influence their performance. The thesis consists of two studies. The first reports on the average test results in relation to linguistic, affective, neurophysiological and socio-economic learner variables, whereas the second one focuses on the individual test results the used lexical inferencing strategies.

The results from the first study show that the bilinguals achieve on average somewhat lower test results. An important factor in connection with good test results is a high proficiency level in Swedish and in previously studied foreign languages. A positive attitude and high motivation are also imperative, whereas the relation between the results and the socio-economic factors is surprisingly weak. On average the bilinguals had studied fewer foreign languages, had lower grades in Swedish and English and came from homes with a lower socio-economic level. They were however more motivated and had a more positive attitude towards languages in general and German in particular.

In the second study the students were compared *ceteris paribus* regarding the individual test results and the used inferencing strategies. In this comparison the bilinguals achieved somewhat better results than the monolinguals in most of the tests. The analysis of the inferencing strategies show that there were one or two types of cues that were preferred in each test irrespective of informant group. Swedish and German orthographical and phonological cues were most popular when identifying words in the non-context tests, whereas local contextual cues were most common in the other tests. Cues from other foreign languages were however used very infrequently. Two main differences between the groups were discovered. The bilinguals tried to explain their strategies and meant that they knew the meaning of the target words more often than the monolinguals. This did not however result in higher test scores, which may suggest that the use of these strategies is due to cultural reasons rather than them being purely knowledge based.

Keywords: bilingualism, multilingualism, L3, second language acquisition, lexical inferencing, individual differences, lexical acquisition