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# Lost in Diglossia? (Un-)Doing Difference by Dealing with Language Variation in Swiss Kindergarten

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## Abstract

Language policy in German-speaking Swiss kindergartens recently has been subject to change. While dialect traditionally was spoken to kindergartners, the use of High German has been established to promote the integration of migrant children and equality of opportunity. In this contribution, we look at how kindergarten teachers translate the new diglossic language policy into language practices. Drawing on data from an ongoing ethnographic study, we examine four logics of language use concerning when to speak dialect or High German. As teachers' use of language differs not only according to situations and pedagogical sequences but also due to children's social and migrant backgrounds, we ask – drawing on the theoretical concept of (un-)doing difference – how different linguistic addressing reflects (and affects) children's positions in the social order.

## Keywords

Kindergarten ethnography, language practice, diglossia, doing/undoing difference, early childhood education

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**Lost in Diglossia?  
(Un-)Doing Difference by Dealing with Language Variations in Swiss  
Kindergartens**

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## Lost in Diglossia?

# (Un-)Doing Difference by Dealing with Language Variations in Swiss Kindergartens

**Abstract:** Language policy in German-speaking Swiss kindergartens recently has been subject to change. While dialect traditionally was spoken to kindergartners, the use of High German has been established to promote integration of migrant children and equality of opportunity. In this contribution, we look at how kindergarten teachers translate the new diglossic language policy into language practices. Drawing on data from an ongoing ethnographic study, we examine four logics of language use concerning when to speak dialect or High German. As teachers' use of language differs not only according to situations and pedagogical sequences but also due to children's social and migrant backgrounds, we ask – drawing on the theoretical concept of *(un-)doing difference* – how different linguistic addressing reflects (and affects) children's positions in the social order.

**Keywords:** kindergarten ethnography, language practice, diglossia, doing/undoing difference, early childhood education

## Introduction

The co-existence of High German and Swiss dialects in German-speaking Switzerland is an issue full of suspense. Dealing with these two language variations functions to 'organize and navigate diversity' in everyday life, and is subject to social and political debate on language policies, especially when 'integration' is at stake (Blommaert 2015, 83). This debates recently had an impact in the field of kindergarten, changing policies and making early education a language focal point. Drawing on ethnographic data from two kindergartens in Zurich, Switzerland, as well as on legal and policy documents, this article follows the educational policies and scrutinises language use in practice.

To start with, the following description takes you to one site when, on a rainy Tuesday in autumn 2016, a policeman came to talk about behaviour in traffic. Our

fieldnotes highlight, in a nutshell, the unclear use of the two language variations:

[abbreviated and simplified from fieldnotes]<sup>1</sup>:

The children are waiting in the chair circle. Policeman Daniel (the children call him Mr. Schmid) is talking dialect to the adults present, organising the morning schedule. Shortly after, Sigrid (teacher) begins the sequence with a good-morning-song in dialect. Then she asks: *‘Welä Tag isch hüt?’* (*‘What day is it today?’*) Elena says: *‘Mäntig’* (*‘Monday’*). Sigrid points to the small coloured cards with the days written on them, affixed to a cupboard. She gives the hint: *‘Es fangt mit D aa.’* (*‘It starts with a D’*). Several children shout: *‘Dunnschtig’* (*‘Thursday’*). Sigrid clarifies that today is *‘Zischtig’* (*‘Tuesday’*), *‘uf Hochtütsch isch das DIENSTAG’* (*‘which in High German is TUESDAY’*). Then the policeman takes over and yells a loud *‘Guete Morge’* (*good morning*), and most of the children echo this with the same words. Before continuing, he asks Sigrid whether to speak High German or dialect, and if there would be children with no understanding of German whatsoever. Sigrid replies that there are some that do not understand well and recommends speaking High German. Thus, the policeman switches to High German and starts his lesson, but after the first sequence, he continues in dialect again. (Green Meadow)

Even without a profound analysis, one can discover a lot in this short sequence. Teacher Sigrid in Green Meadow kindergarten speaks and sings in dialect, but advises the policeman to speak in High German for reasons of understanding. He reflects on the language issue and supposes that some children might understand neither High German nor dialect. Sigrid creates confusion, as the dialectal *‘Zischtig’* the children use does not start with a ‘D’. Finally, the policeman initially follows her advice to speak High German but slips back into dialect. Hence, dealing with the two variations of German in kindergarten appears to be accompanied by pitfalls, misunderstandings and a broad uncertainty.

The purported ambiguity of teachers’ language use in the two sites we studied is remarkable. Although daily routines and other aspects of education are pedagogically

well planned and elaborated, the teachers often do not seem to follow a consistent linguistic way of teaching. Their language use, thus, is interesting in several ways. It reflects language policies and political discourses around so-called integration and equity of opportunity (e.g. EDK 2003) whereby language can be seen ‘not only as subject and medium of instruction, but also as our very means of expression, of identity and knowledge construction’ (Hornberger 2010, xi). Moreover, language produces difference between children, especially in multilingual educational environments (Neumann and Seele 2014).

The emerging focus on language when it comes to the processing of differences is not unique to Switzerland. There seems to be a greater trend to make language a decisive criterion, reflected for instance in the booming of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in the U.S. or in calling the formerly named ‘immigrants’ in the Danish School context ‘bi-linguals’ now (Gilliam et al. 2017). The question of diglossia, however, renders especially visible the slippery road of dealing with differences and makes language use in Swiss kindergarten an interesting case.

Through our field observations, we investigate two topics. The first is how kindergarten teachers, based on the legal framework set by educational policy, make use of language variation in the classroom. What variation of German do they use and under which circumstances? When do they switch from High German to dialect, and vice versa, and what provokes such switching? Second, we examine the consequences arising from diglossic language use in relation to the production of difference between children and adults, as well as among subgroups of children.

In the following sections, we first look at educational policy and the debate regarding language use in kindergarten. Then, we present our field sites and the study design as well as our theoretical and methodological considerations. In the results

sections, we elaborate four empirical logics of hybrid language use in kindergarten, as well as teachers' linguistic practices of (un-)doing difference. The article concludes with some concluding remarks.

### **Language Policy and Debate in Swiss Kindergarten**

In Switzerland, aside from several immigrant languages being spoken, there are four official languages: German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romanic. The canton of Zurich, where this research took place, is officially German-speaking, and the linguistic situation can be described as diglossic because, two language variations are in use simultaneously. High German (standard German) is used predominantly as a written language and in official settings such as public speeches and news programmes, while local Alemannic dialects (e.g. the Zurich dialect, *Züritütsch*) are spoken in everyday life and written in rather informal contexts.

With compulsory education in the 19th century, High German became the official written and spoken language in schools (Gsteiger and Ott 2012). While in Germany, speaking dialect was symbolic of bad breeding and crude behaviour (Auer 2017), the Swiss-German dialects remained an accepted means of oral communication in everyday life. In today's schools, High German usually is spoken from first grade onwards, relegating dialects strictly to informal situations like breaks. Kindergartens, however, traditionally did not belong to the school system, but were a community service. Therefore, until the end of the last century, dialect was spoken, and there were no substantial efforts to implement High German as a kindergarten classroom language (Landert 2007). This changed around the turn of the millennium, based on discussions regarding the PISA 2000 language test results (similar to many European countries; Pons 2012). In 2003, the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education released

an action plan demanding an increased, earlier and more sophisticated use of High German from kindergarten onwards (EDK 2003).

In the second half of the 2000s, the canton of Zurich incorporated kindergartens into the school system in a new education act. The act also declared High German, in addition to dialect, as a classroom language. Thereupon, a broad public and political debate emerged on the question of whether High German should be spoken in kindergartens (for an overview throughout Switzerland, see Studer 2006). Promoters argued that children would improve their language skills by learning High German as early as possible, especially those with a migrant background, which would lead to better integration and equality of opportunity. Meanwhile, opponents talked up the use of dialect as a question of national culture and identity (Knoll 2016, 2018). In 2011, the opponents' side won a referendum, again changing the legal framework for language use in kindergarten. The new education act, which forms the legal framework for kindergarten, declared dialect to be the main classroom language in kindergarten:

§24. The language of instruction in the first two years after starting school (kindergarten) is basically the dialect, from the third year on (primary school) basically High German. (Kantonsrat Kanton Zürich 2005)

The kindergarten curriculum is based on the education act. It was implemented initially in 2010, and adjusted in 2012 to substantialise the legal change:

On kindergarten level, dialect basically must be used as classroom language. [...] Teaching sequences in High German are possible, but they should be restricted to situations with a clear reference to High German inputs or situations (e.g. single rhymes, songs, [...]). (Bildungsdirektion Kanton Zürich 2011)<sup>2</sup>

The legal framework seems to be quite restrictive concerning the use of High German in kindergarten classes, at least in the education act. Nevertheless, the expression

‘basically’ allows for exceptions within the curriculum. Although the use of High German is ‘restricted’, it is not explicitly defined how often teachers may use it. Despite the political pressure to speak dialect in kindergarten as a consequence of the referendum, the current policy offers room for teachers to use both dialect *and* High German as classroom languages.

### **Research Context: Field, Sites and Study**

This article draws on data from the research project ‘Conspicuous children. An ethnography of processes of recognition in the kindergarten’.<sup>3</sup> We therefore visited kindergartens in the Canton of Zurich from August 2016 to July 2017, going up to four times per week in the beginning, while the frequency was reduced to three or four mornings per month. Kindergartens from different neighbourhoods were chosen to variate socio-economic status and proportion of migrant population. Language policy and dealing with diglossia was not our initial research interest, but it turned out to be a bigger issue in two of our kindergarten sites. Thus, we began to focus on this subject, paying close attention to language use and diglossic switches.

Besides analysing our fieldnotes, we used audio-transcripts from several door-and-fishing-talks we conducted with teachers, and we studied legal and policy documents and the kindergarten curriculum as well as political debates about the issue. Meanwhile, comparing and contrasting (Bollig and Kelle 2012) the two kindergartens showed differences in teachers’ language practices, enabling us to sharpen our analysis and, leading to more substantial results.<sup>4</sup>

One kindergarten, to which we refer as *Green Meadow* is located in a neighbourhood where the 19 four- to six-year-old pupils are mostly of lower working-class migrant families. Only two children sometimes speak Swiss dialect at home,



whereas Albanian, Amharic, Arabic, Edo, English, Italian, Kurdish, Polish, Portuguese, Serbian, Slovakian, Spanish, Tamil, Turkish, Twi and Urdu is spoken by and to one or several children.

Two teachers, Judith and Sigrid, share the responsibility for the class; Judith is also in charge of courses in German as a Second Language (Deutsch als Zweitsprache, DaZ). Schools with at least a 40% migrant population (as in Green Meadow) have an additional subsidy for DaZ-courses compared to other schools; these courses are held several hours a week, in High German. Judith and Sigrid's self-declared language use follows the rule 'one face, one language': Judith speaks High German, Sigrid speaks dialect. Judith argues that, being the language teacher, she also wants to stick to this role during regular classes to avoid confusing children with a second language variation. Furthermore, she points out that High German should not only be connected to language learning but be an integral part of everyday life in kindergarten. Because Sigrid speaks dialect to the children, Judith declares that they are fully compliant with the legal framework.

*Vogelsanger Alley*, the second kindergarten, has pupils from working- and middle-class backgrounds. The district's ongoing urban gentrification process is changing the kindergarten's composition, however: The share of working-class children is declining in favour of the neighbourhood's new children from well-off families. Thus, the kindergarten soon might lose part of its subsidy for DaZ-courses. Still, 60 percent of the children learn German as a second language, speaking several European, Asian and African languages at home.

As in Green Meadow, two teachers, Lukrezia and Martin, share the workload, while the DaZ-courses are covered by an additional language teacher. Lukrezia and Martin declare that their teaching is 'basically' held in High German, referring to the

special case of diversified neighbourhoods and their duty to promote equality of opportunity, namely for migrant children. Being aware that this may be not completely in line with the educational act and the kindergarten curriculum, they argue that they speak dialect with those children who speak dialect at home.

As we were yet more adults in the field, we struggled not only with the amount of participation during our visits, but also with our own dealing with diglossia. Both of us raised in Switzerland, it went without saying that chatting with the kindergarten teachers was always in dialect. While we spent time there, teachers never addressed us in High German, no matter which variation they used with the children at the time. Thus, our presence complicated the already complex linguistic situation, implementing yet another layer of different addressing, that is, addressing the researchers.

Regarding our interactions with the children, dealing with diglossia was an issue. We often talked with the children, simply because they got used to us and asked for help and attention, for an adult play mate or for somebody to talk to. Although we tried to step out of pedagogical duties, this practice became more and more blurred – knowing the basic rules after several visits, it would have been absurd to send a child with questions like ‘can I go to the toilet?’ to a teacher if a simple ‘yes’ avoided wasted time and energy (and wet trousers). Probably also to emphasise our role as non-teachers, we almost always spoke dialect to the children, but time and again, we found ourselves confused. It helped to reflect upon our own language use to single out different logics for dealing with diglossia.

### **Conceptualising Policy Implementations and Teachers’ Practices of (Un-)Doing Difference**

Methodologically, we situate our study in educational ethnography and ethnographic classroom research (e.g. see Delamont and Atkinson 1996; Hammersley 1990; Sieber

Egger and Unterweger 2018; Walford 2008). Starting from the assumption that schools and classrooms are familiar to the researcher and therefore have to be ‘made strange’ (Delamont and Atkinson 1996) we explore teachers’ and pupils’ everyday action and interaction, treating them as not self-evident and in need of explanation. Educational ethnography research has fruitfully addressed issues of immigration and differentiation in educational contexts (Yon 2003). We refer to this research to investigate processes of differentiation within kindergarten, but we also seek to contribute to a broader understanding of teaching, learning and everyday life, that is, to an ethnography of kindergarten (cf. Neumann 2013).

Ethnographically studying language practices in classrooms involves dealing with the two language variations *in situ*, as well as analysis of educational language policies which, while being implemented, are ‘interpreted, negotiated, and ultimately (re)constructed’ (Menken and García 2010, 1). The implementation of educational policy strongly depends on the pedagogical staff; in line with Menken and García, we conceptualize educators as ‘the epicenter of this dynamic process, acting on their agency to change the various language education policies they must translate into practice’ (2010, 1).

Combining the analysis of policy implementation with West and Fenstermaker’s (1995, 9) concept of *doing difference* enables us to fruitfully think of the social positioning of children based on category memberships that are constantly in the making in ‘ongoing interactional accomplishments.’ As we are interested in a sociocultural perspective on schooling and the divergent practices of linguistically addressing children, as well as the consequences that arise from these, we first look at the conceptualisation of difference and practices of (un-)doing difference.

Human difference and person-related differentiation are well-established topics in the social sciences. Several strains of conceptualising human differences and diversity have developed in recent years, especially against the backdrop of modern and complex societies (e.g. see Brubaker 2015; Vertovec 2007). We draw on West and Fenstermaker's approach of doing difference, whereby differences 'rest on and are situated in history, institutional practices, and social structure, rather than disembodied from people's lives' (1995, 509). Coming from gender studies, West and Fenstermaker seek to advance the understanding of difference to provide more fluidity than approaches such as intersectionality do.

Although they pay much attention to the processes of categorisation, little is said about the silencing, muting and blurring of those categories. Therefore, we additionally use Hirschauer's (2014) thoughts on *undoing* differences to describe the contingency of social practice, arguing that differentiations can not only come to the fore but also can be neglected and retracted. By analysing complex movements of multiple category memberships, doing difference is always a meaningful selection out of a set of competing categories (Hirschauer 2014, 2017).

As we will show, the ways children get sorted, categorised and linguistically addressed as members of certain categories at different levels – such as 'kindergartners', 'migrants', 'dialect-natives' etc. – are connected to kindergarten language policy. Language use in general, and the use of the two German language variations in particular, is a means to address children as being different from adults, but also as being different from each other. Such practices of differentiation, however, are far from being stable.

On the linguistic level, we draw on the theoretical concept of *codeswitching* to access diglossic language use. Codeswitching refers to the act of changing between

languages or language variations. Gumperz and Hernández-Chavez (1972) distinguish codeswitching as inserting entire sentences into another language from just using loan words. For example, when investigating bilingual speakers of English and Spanish in the U.S., they found that, when talking to each other, the speakers switched to Spanish to refer to common experiences, to express emotional ties and to emphasise difference to monolingual individuals (Gumperz and Hernández-Chavez 1972). Meanwhile, the concept of codeswitching has been elaborated and extended by distinguishing between switching inside (*intrasentential*) and between (*intersentential*) sentences (e.g. Wei 2008).

Drawing on this conceptual framework, we empirically focus on linguistic practices of kindergarten teachers with regard to children. We use our observations of these practices to investigate how teachers make use of language variations and thereby (un-)do differences among their pupils. The use of more than one language (variation) in (pre-)school settings has been addressed in a number of studies in different countries and linguistic contexts (e.g. Cazden 2001; Hélot 2003; Honig et al. 2013; Kim et al. 2018). Particularly interesting is the case of Luxembourg because the linguistic situation is comparable to the one in Switzerland (co-presence of multiple languages, including migrant languages) and because some studies focus on practices of differentiation with an ethnographic perspective. Teachers in Luxembourg generally use several linguistic resources to speak in preschools. Scholars identified a line of differentiation between children and adults, as well as one between migrant and non-migrant children, both of which were drawn by the teachers' translingual language use (Neumann 2011, 2015; Neumann and Seele 2014). In German-speaking Switzerland, similar differentiation was observed in settings with diglossic language use (Kassis-Filippakou and

Panagiotopoulou 2015). The production of difference by language use in kindergarten, however, remains a substantial gap in research.

### **Three Logics of Hybrid Language Use**

In our two kindergartens, both High German and dialect are spoken. The question is when do the teachers use which variation. It has been argued that switching from one linguistic variation to another is sometimes just a ‘slip of the tongue’ (Gumperz and Hernández-Chavez 1972). We indeed have experienced such arbitrary codeswitching that would not fit into any apparent explanation. Nonetheless, some patterns in language use that transcend arbitrariness can be identified. We refer to these as *logics of hybrid language use*. These logics frame the modalities of language use in kindergarten; they define changes from one language variation to the other. Further, we treat them as competing layers, able to overlie one another.

In this section, we present three logics of hybrid language use to address the first research question about how kindergarten teachers make use of language variations in the classroom: the pedagogical sequence, the immediate situation and the arc of suspense. A fourth logic will be elaborated in the following section, leading directly to answering our second research question, what consequences arise from diglossic language use in relation to the production of difference.

#### ***Prepared and Elaborated: The Pedagogical Sequence***

Around 20 pupils are sitting in a circle formation on their small chairs, waiting for the sequence to begin; an everyday morning procedure. Martin is sitting with them while preparing teaching material. Lukrezia informs Martin that some children forgot to stow away their clothes pegs (which indicate where they had played before). Martin says: *‘Händ ihr alli a eues Chlöppli tänkt? (1) Oh-oh, Also, Chinde, ich lauf dure und ihr nämed eues wenn ers gsehnd’* (*‘Did you all think*

*about your peg? (1) Uh-oh. So, kids, I walk by and you take your peg as you see it').* Martin walks around and waits for three children to pick their peg and stow it away, stating: *'Thr zwei, nämeds, los, und dänn versorge, los!'* ('*You two, take it, let's go, and now stow it away, go!*'). The children addressed run off to take their pegs to a rack. Meanwhile, the rest of the children and Martin wait in the circle for about 25 seconds. It is very silent, nobody is talking, only Martin whistling now and then. Once all are back, Martin says out loud: *'So!'* ('*Alright!*'). Silence, then after a few seconds: *'HEUTE KÖNNEN WIR WIEDER NEU VERTEILEN'* ('*TODAY WE CAN DISTRIBUTE NEW AGAIN*'). (Vogelsanger Alley)

In this case, the circle sequence indicates the transition between a prior sequence of free play and the subsequent gym class in the sports hall. The circle is a didactically strong lead format, with a predefined procedure of tasks and actions, such as welcoming and counting the present children, singing songs, distributing duties, etc.; it can be interpreted as an expression of pedagogical seriousness in kindergarten. For Martin, as his codeswitching at the formal starting point of the circle sequence (and in many other similar observed situations) shows, getting serious is closely linked to talking High German.<sup>5</sup> Before this, he spoke dialect to the children, asking them to stow away their pegs. Once the actual circle sequence began ('*So!*'), he immediately switched to High German, and stayed there for the following 20 minutes during the circle sequence.

Besides the circle, there are other pedagogical formats and sequences in Vogelsanger Alley that are associated with use of a specific language. On the one hand, High German is used when children are separated into smaller subgroups and involved in special activities like performing handicraft work or language classes. Teachers also speak High German in the painting class with the whole group of children, as that is a didactical sequence lead by kindergarten teachers. On the other hand, dialect is primarily spoken during free play, in the morning break on the playground outdoors and, often embedded in circle sequences, in rhymes and songs.<sup>6</sup>

Whereas rhymes and songs may be seen as cultural assets and therefore be linked to dialect, the reason for using dialect is rather pedagogical in the case of the two former examples: free play and the morning break are associated with less teacher instructions than circles and language lessons. Hence, dialect is associated with playing, being self-acting, being ‘allowed to be a child’, and an ‘unburdened’ childhood, but High German is associated with teaching, learning and more ‘school-like’ didactical formats (cf. Knoll 2016; Sieber Egger, Unterweger, and Herzig 2018).

### ***Sudden Codeswitching: The Immediate Situation***

Another logic of language use is bound to situations that emerge spontaneously, such as a teacher who wants children to stop immediately when they are not allowed to perform a certain activity:

During the morning circle, Judith explains in High German that every weekday would correspond to a certain colour. Monday is blue, Tuesday yellow, etc. Now, the children, in groups of four, are asked to step into the middle of the circle, where several silk scarfs in the corresponding colours are laid out on the floor. Judith vividly says: ‘*hobedi-hobedi-hobedi-hopp*’, and the children must jump and hop around, but immediately freeze their body movement when she stops talking. Judith says: ‘GRÜN’ (‘GREEN’), and the children must look for the green scarf and touch it with their toes as fast as possible. Abishru not only jumps but pushes and pokes others. Judith interrupts: ‘*Stop Abishru, nöd eso. Ich sägs nöd namal.*’ (..) OK, MACHEN WIR WEITER’ (‘*Stop Abishru, not that way. I won’t say it again.*’ (..) OK, LET’S CONTINUE’). The last group of children is in the middle now. They react slowly to the instructions, and Judith says in a low voice: ‘*Nöd iischlafe*’ (‘*Don’t fall asleep*’), rather directed to herself (or me, sitting close to her?). She then continues with instructions in High German. (Green Meadow)

In Vogelsanger Alley, teachers generally speak High German in didactically led formats. Judith does so equally in Green Meadow, but suddenly flips the switch and talks dialect, indicating an emotional involvement in Abishru’s ‘fooling around’ and the



children's 'laziness'. Quite often, we observed that in situations with emotions involved, teachers in both kindergartens talked dialect to the children, be it when scolding or consoling (even though, for example, Lukrezia told us that she thought it was important to speak High German also in emotional situations because if High German were only the formal school language, the children would develop a negative relationship to it). Emotionality seems to be a trigger for dialect, like formal learning is one for High German. Other triggers for the use of dialect are small adjustment instructions to children (e.g. while sitting in a circle: '*Please move a bit*') and short evaluations of children's individual work ('*That's wrong here*', '*Good, you can go play*', etc.).

### ***The Arc of Suspense***

I enter the kindergarten building and first have a short chat with Lukrezia. We speak dialect, as she does with the pupils and Martin. When Charlotte enters the room, Lukrezia immediately takes her by her hand and moves to the atelier corner to explain what they will do later in the morning. Charlotte's parents are from Germany, they speak High German with her at home, but she also understands and speaks dialect in kindergarten. At the beginning of Lukrezia's explanation, which takes about two minutes in total, she talks dialect to Charlotte, who is only listening. But more and more she switches to High German, letting a sentence in dialect be followed by one in High German. At the end of the conversation, she switches completely to High German. (Vogelsanger Alley)

Before kindergarten begins in the morning, Lukrezia and Martin speak dialect with each other to coordinate their work of the day. When the first children arrive, we observed that they start talking in dialect to them but then by and by switch to High German when talking to the children. Thus coming from a largely dialect-shaped linguistic environment, they switch over to High German in class. Lukrezia changes from dialect to High German during the interaction with Charlotte, thereby moving into her role as a

teacher giving language training. Before this shift, she did not talk any High German to the children, but she does so after that and predominantly during the rest of the morning.

The same day, just before lunch time, they did another circle sequence, when Lukrezia started switching back to dialect again. Speaking High German is demanding for the teachers, they must ‘force’ themselves to do so, as Martin once put it. In Green Meadow, Judith commented that speaking High German was more exhausting, and after a tough morning, she would more easily fall back into dialect. Furthermore, every song Green Meadow has in its repertoire to ritually say goodbye before leaving is sung in dialect. No matter how often and intense High German is used during the morning classes, the children always leave the building with some cheery and catchy dialect rhythms in their ears.

Taking these observations together, there is a linguistic arc of suspense that spans the whole morning: Tension is raised in the morning when High German is increasingly spoken and maintained for two or three hours. Towards the end of class, tension decreases when the teachers switch to dialect again. In other words, language use in kindergarten resembles a gym lesson – both for pupils and teachers. There is a ‘warm up’ (heat up muscles – switch to High German), a training session (muscle training – language teaching) and a ‘cool down’ (stretching – switch back to dialect). The training is goal oriented (muscle growth – language acquisition), temporarily restricted (1-2 hours – 2-3 hours per day) and may contain moments of relaxation (training breaks – dialect use now and then).

### **Doing Difference (Fourth Logic)**

The fourth logic of language use refers to different subjects and addressees in interactions, to what attributes are assigned to them and what kind of relationship they

have to each other. Individuals become ‘kindergartners’, ‘learning-subjects’ and ‘professionals’ by the use of language variations. In both kindergartens, teachers adjust their language practices in relation to addressees. They speak dialect to each other, most times even in pedagogical sequences, while they speak High German to the children. They also speak dialect to us, the researchers, and to parents (except for those who they assume do not understand it). Thus, High German is spoken almost exclusively to pupils. Hence, a linguistic gap between adults and children is established, referred to by Alanen (2001) as a *generational difference*. By switching to dialect and talking in a different tone and speed, teaching sequences where all children are addressed are interrupted by intermediate conversations among adults, clearly marked as ‘adult-talk only’, such as: ‘*Isch da Zucker i ihrem Ässe?* ARPUTHA, IST DA ZUCKER IN DEINEM ESSEN?’ (‘*Is there sugar in her meal?* ARPUTHA, IS THERE SUGAR IN YOUR MEAL?’; directed first to the assistant teacher, quick-spoken, then slowly spoken to the girl), or: ‘*Hät de Pedro bschisse?*’ (‘*Did Pedro cheat?*’; directed to Sigrid and the researcher, while Judith was playing a game in High German with the children). The codeswitching produces a generational difference between two category memberships: ‘children’ and ‘adults’.

We observed a second line of differentiation that divides children in need of language training from those without. This line differs in the two kindergartens; two processes are at play. As mentioned, Lukrezia told us that they generally speak High German with their pupils in Vogelsanger Alley and dialect only in one-on-one-interactions with children who speak dialect at home. This declaration corresponds, by and large, to the practice observable in class. The difference made relevant here is linked to ethnicity – we call it an *ethnified difference*.

In Green Meadow, however, Judith switches to dialect far more frequently by addressing children who have sound knowledge both in High German and dialect; thus, speaking dialect with those children she considers less in need of language support. We call this difference based on a situated assessment of a child's language performance a *pedagogical difference*. If children are treated as in need of language training, talking to them generally must follow a maxim of learning. Because High German is seen as the language of school and education, the teachers use it as the language of (formal) learning. While ethnicity is the criteria to differentiate children in Vogelsanger Alley, language assessment makes the difference in Green Meadow; mechanisms of doing difference according to a differentiation of children in need of language training and those without thus are observable in both sites but based upon divergent criteria.

In summary, differences between 'adults' and 'children', between 'natives' and 'foreigners', and between children being treated more and less as language learners are produced by dealing with diglossia. Focussing upon pupils, and based on the analysis of teachers' judgements (e.g. how they assess the children's language skills) and practices we collected in both sites, we identified three subgroups, which are generated in class by the interplay of these differences, or more precisely, by the interplay of membership categories according to our empirical data:

- (1) Children who speak dialect as a first language,
- (2) Children with a migrant background who speak and understand dialect and/or High German, and
- (3) Children with a migrant background who do not (sufficiently) speak and understand dialect or High German.

We identified group 1 only in Vogelsanger Alley. Lukrezia and Martin often talk dialect with these children in one-on-one-interactions but sometimes also in situations when

other pupils are involved. With group 2, teachers in Green Meadow talk High German or dialect, depending on who is teaching (Sigrid dialect and Judith High German, by and large). In one-on-one situations, however, Judith switches to dialect with children she assesses as being smart and having more German language skills, whereas Sigrid sometimes switches to High German when she considers that something really needs to be learned by the pupil being addressed.

Two ways of categorisation overlap here. There is a strong institutional tendency to group together children who do speak a language other than dialect or High German at home, thus using first language as a decisive membership category. Education, however, or the idea of smartness, can lead to a different categorisation so that children ‘escape the notion of foreign altogether’ (Bundgaard and Gulløv 2006, 150).

In Vogelsanger Alley, on the other hand, Lukrezia and Martin mostly talk High German with children from group 2. Similarly, both do this with group 3, but somewhat differently. They sometimes use a shortened language, as shown in the following interactions with two boys, both from families with Turkish migrant backgrounds:

Mohamed is playing with Duplo. Lukrezia comes up and takes him to the door, saying: ‘WO IST KLÜPPLI?’ (‘WHERE IS PEG?’). Mohamed does not react. Lukrezia shows him that he must first attach his peg on the right slot on the door. ‘DANN DARF MOHAMED HIER SPIELEN’ (‘THEN MOHAMED MAY PLAY HERE’), she adds. (Vogelsanger Alley)

Sigrid is addressing Cihan while changing clothes before gym classes: ‘CIHAN LANGSAM, KINDER SCHNELL, WIE AUTO. ABER CIHAN LANGSAM’ (‘CIHAN SLOW, CHILDREN FAST, LIKE CAR. BUT CIHAN SLOW’). (Green Meadow)

Both times, the pupil is addressed in the third person and not in the designated form (‘you’). Certain words, like articles or verbs, are left out. Doing so, teachers categorise

children like Mohamed and Cihan into group 3, implying that they do not (sufficiently) speak and understand German. They eventually position them not only as children in need of language training but by addressing them only indirectly, the teachers linguistically do not talk *with* them but *about* them. Their utterances also address surrounding children, and thereby, the social ordering of children becomes extra visible because, especially in the case of Cihan, a difference is drawn between ‘children’ and himself.

By dealing with diglossia, teachers display (previously not visible) linguistic difference, and thereby, transform it to a relevant social difference. They do not react to an already given heterogeneity but produce difference based on their language practices, thereby drawing on categories like ethnicity and generation.

### **Undoing Difference**

In the previous sections, we described four logics of language use: (1) the pedagogical sequence, (2) the immediate situation, (3) the arc of suspense and (4) an addressee-oriented logic; the latter being associated with generational, pedagogical and ethnified differences. We have said nothing yet, however, about the interplay among these logics that we, as mentioned above, conceptually treat as competing layers, able to overlay one another. Certain dynamics of overlaying lead to what Hirschauer (2014) describes as *undoing* difference. He makes a case for a ‘dynamic notion of pushing, breaking off and pausing of differentiations’, which also could ‘go to ground’ and no longer be relevant (Hirschauer 2014, 194). If, for example, teachers speak High German to all children in a circle sequence (logic 1), the pedagogical/ethnified difference dissolves, while the generational difference remains in force. Or, if teachers scold all children in dialect (logic 2), both the pedagogical/ethnified and the generational difference disappear

because the children and adults become linguistically inseparable.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, if one of the first three logics overlays the fourth, lines of differentiation are drawn differently, and not according to differentiation between pupils – the subgroups are undone.

Furthermore, there is a second mechanism of undoing difference. The differentiation of children into subgroups is thrown over when they are addressed ‘upside down’:

Lukrezia is sitting on a table with Aman (English native speaker) and Mario (Swiss German dialect speaker), doing handicraft work. Since Lukrezia does not agree with the work of Aman, she comments: *‘Das stimmt nöd’* (*‘That isn’t right’*). Shortly later, she advises Mario who seems a little distracted: ‘DU MACHST HIER WEITER’ (‘YOU CONTINUE HERE’). (Vogelsanger Alley)

Teachers even use intrasentential codeswitching. For example, in the following case, Lukrezia is with a girl who speaks tamil at home: *‘Das isch sehr guet, Anusuya, DAS HAST DU GUT GEMACHT’* (*‘That’s very nice Anusuya, YOU DID THAT WELL’*). In this sequence, as well as in the previous one, none of the logics described previously seems to fit. The teachers’ codeswitching may either be interpreted here as a professional strategy to address children in an appropriate way in that situation, e.g. to gain their attention, and facilitate their language learning by gently leading them to High German; or it may indeed appear to be a simple ‘slip of the tongue’. One also can take it as a sign that the actors do not have complete power over their speech acts nor over language use as a whole, as one could argue, for example, with Butler (1997). By all means, any stability of differentiations, if assumed at all, is broken up by the apparent unpredictability of language use.

Considering these examples of disappearance and dissolution, one can conclude that differences between children, as well as between children and adults, can immediately appear and disappear again shortly after; teachers alternate between doing

and *undoing* difference. Because differences must be enacted and re-enacted in language practice, it seems likely that they are not re-enacted every single time.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, we examined how kindergarten teachers in German-speaking Switzerland deal with language variations and the consequences that arise thereof. Our analysis showed how teachers follow three situational and one person-oriented logic in classroom when using the two standardized and institutionalized language variations, dialect and High German. Codeswitching can be seen as their way to ensure that both language variations are spoken, and it manifests the specific appropriation of the scope of action that the education act and kindergarten curriculum offer. But teachers also are actors in an ongoing public debate; they must deal with a political area of tension among High German, putatively promising education, integration and equity of opportunity, and dialect, which is associated with national culture and identity. The political demand for national identity building in kindergarten, both on the level of the individual child and society, increases the expectations of teachers' work which already are high in view of their responsibilities within an inclusive education program.

Working in a kindergarten is clearly not a simple task under these circumstances. Considering this, teachers' language use also may be treated as a manifestation of their professional competencies. They can react spontaneously and calm to tough and demanding situations, such as consoling a child in dialect while simultaneously instructing others in High German. By doing this, teachers deal with educational challenges or just make the class go round.

Language practices in kindergarten, however, have consequences for the differentiation of children, as our analysis showed. Teachers address children who speak



dialect at home in High German *or* in their first language variation, thereby acknowledging their bilingualism. With migrant children, they talk predominantly in High German, addressing them and making them visible as needing special language training. Those children's language skills in their first language and, often also in dialect, are mostly ignored or treated as an obstacle for German language acquisition. Thus, they risk being unable to follow instructions in class, which may even raise the gap between them and the dialect native speakers that ought to be diminished according to equity policy.

Hence, difference between children is not (only) to be seen as an a priori given social fact that kindergarten has to deal with. Difference also is produced and reproduced in kindergarten, where, in our case, diglossic policy and language use is a prominent tool to do so. Taking a broader perspective, there is no need to say that difference is not just established by language use but can be based on many categories, e.g. class, gender. Our research shows that teachers draw on such categories of difference, and they combine generation and ethnicity to categorise children and align their language practices according to these categorisations.

There is yet another side to the difference story, and language use in kindergarten makes it equally visible. Teachers are *doing* generational, ethnified and pedagogical differences, but they are also *undoing* them. Barely introduced and established, differences are broken up again by planned and situational codeswitching, by inverted logics of differentiation, or just by the fragility and arbitrariness of language use, rendering visible that language, after all, is not as stable and standardized as institutionally claimed. And finally, the results point to the situational production of communication in which, from a large pool of linguistic repertoires, two

institutionalized language variations are selected, the particular use of which draws new boundaries.

Are teachers thus lost in diglossia? Despite the inconsistencies, pitfalls and contradictions in language policy and practice, we would not say so. Diglossic language use is providing teachers with an extended language repertoire to situationally manage diversity in classroom. It is rather the tension between expanding and regulating linguistic complexity that the field of school – and especially early education – has to come to terms with, because its pupils are more likely not enrolling with the same language experiences and repertoires. Recognising this, it may also be possible to consider which linguistic norms should shape future kindergarten teaching, and how the school system is able to open up room for a less standardized and codified, but nevertheless regulated language use.

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1 Extracts from fieldnotes, conversation transcripts and policy documents were translated into English. To display the two different German language variations, we add the original citations and highlight linguistic sequences in High German with CAPITALS (e.g. DIENSTAG), and those in dialect *in italic* (e.g. *Zischtig*).

2 There are many local and regional Swiss German dialects spoken in German-speaking Switzerland, which differ substantially from each other. Because neither the education act nor the curriculum specify the term ‘dialect’, we simply refer to it as such for consistency.

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4 The research design of the overall study is comparative. For more information, see Sieber Egger and Unterweger (2018).

5 This corresponds to findings from Luxembourg, where preschool teachers speak Luxemburgish if language use is linked to pedagogical ambitions (Neumann 2011).

6 Kassis-Filippakou and Panagiotopoulou (2015) equally found, for the canton of Basel-Country, that High German is usually used for stronger lead classroom formats, like circle sequences, whereas dialect is spoken in the breaks, at lunch time and during free play.

7 However, when considering other linguistic aspects than just the use of language variations, one may argue that the generational difference remains in force because teachers would not scold adults the way they scold children.