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A Country in Focus

Research on language teaching and learning in Austria (2004–2009)

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This overview of six years of research on language learning and teaching in Austria covers a period of dynamic development in the field. While all the studies reviewed here illustrate research driven by a combination of local and global concerns and theoretical frameworks, some specific clusters of research interest emerge. The first of these focuses on issues connected with multilingualism in present-day society in terms of language policy, theory development and, importantly, the critical scrutiny of dominant discursive practices in connection with minority and migrant languages. In combination with this focus, there is a concern with German as a second or foreign language in a number of contexts. A second cluster concerns the area of language testing and assessment, which has gained political import due to changes in national education policy and the introduction of standardized tests. Finally, a third cluster of research concerns the diverse types of specialized language instruction, including the introduction of foreign language instruction from age six onwards, the rise of academic writing instruction, English-medium education and, as a final more general issue, the role of English as a dominant language in the canon of all foreign and second languages in Austria.

1. Introduction – Scope and purpose

Like all contributions to this series, this article aims to provide an international readership with an overview of the research into language teaching and learning undertaken in one country during a designated period of time. The period reviewed for Austria runs from 2004 to 2009, although we decided to step outside this period on one or two occasions so that we could properly represent issues that we consider particularly important.

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The selection of the material presented – and a selection it necessarily is – follows a combination of formal and thematic criteria: we mainly report on books, book chapters, journal articles and doctoral dissertations. Master theses that are otherwise unpublished were excluded, even though they sometimes contain original work. Their large number would have meant too strong a bias towards our own university's context. On some occasions, where interesting work would otherwise be inaccessible, we also included technical reports and project reports.

Not least because of the smallness of the country, Austrian researchers on language learning and language teaching are well integrated into international research communities: Germany is one important link, as are the academic scenes in other European languages like French, Spanish or the Slavic languages, as well as the global research scene operating in English. Most of the work reported on in this article is, however, written in German. Our main aim in this article is to provide insight into work that may be inaccessible to researchers outside Austria. This means that work that is easily accessible internationally (which effectively means published with international publishers, mostly in English) will be mentioned but not discussed in any detail.

The strong international ties of the Austrian research scene are reflected in the thematic fields where the greatest research activity is happening. In a brief survey among experienced members of the community, the following strands were mentioned as most relevant for the immediate future: multilingualism and the status and role of different languages in the curriculum (e.g. English as a lingua franca – ELF), learning through a second or foreign language (e.g. L2 German in the mainstream and Content and Language Integrated Learning: CLIL), and standardization in language assessment. There are, however, additional thematic fields where Austrian work undertaken in the 2004–2009 period is of interest to international scholars: the notion of interculturality in language teaching, early language learning within the school system, and work on different aspects of the language classroom, especially with regard to teaching methodology.

It is evident that the concerns mirrored in these themes are not particular to Austria but represent current global and/or European issues. One objective of this series of country surveys in *Language Teaching* is to demonstrate how such global themes are effectively put to the test, as it were, and made relevant to local conditions in the communities reported on. Furthermore, we believe that this is the only way in which research can hope to participate in transforming abstract conceptualizations into practical realities. This process of translation is, however, rarely one-sided: the lessons learned in particular contexts feed back into general thinking – if they are taken note of by the research community.

In presenting the rationale for our choices, a further concern should be addressed at this point: throughout the article it will become obvious that many of the issues that arise have to do with the role of English VIS-À-VIS those of other languages. Quite independently from higher-level policies, the status of the international lingua franca translates into specific student and parental choices and other low-level policy decisions that spark research fuelled by two complementary philosophies: critical research into the dominant practices, and research critical OF dominant practices. The inherent tension between these will be evident throughout this paper, as it has an influence on the volume of research done and thus partly determines our choice of material.

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These, then, are the thematic clusters that we are reporting on in this article:

- language policy
- multilingualism
- early language learning in the classroom
- second or foreign language as medium of learning and as a lingua franca
- interculturality
- teaching methodology
- assessment, testing and educational standardization.

We are aware that there is other significant work that – in the interest of the coherence and readability of this report – our focus on these themes leaves unmentioned.

2. Background

A brief sketch of the role of languages in the Austrian education system will aid in contextualizing the research which is being carried out. Apart from German, which is the main official language of the Republic of Austria, the constitution also recognizes several minority languages: Austrian Sign Language and the languages of the autochthonous minorities such as the Croatians in Burgenland, the Slovenians in Carinthia and Styria, the Hungarians in Burgenland and Vienna, the Czechs and Slovaks in Vienna, and the Roma in Burgenland. In the 2001 census 1.5% of the Austrian population said that they belonged to one of these autochthonous minorities and confirmed that they spoke the respective first languages. The proportions speaking the languages of newly immigrated ethnic groups are comparatively larger: among these, Turkish (2.3%) ranks before Serbian (2.2%), followed by a wide array of European and non-European first language speakers. In urban areas, most classrooms therefore feature a sizeable number of students who do not have German as their family language.

The constitutionally recognized Slovene and Croatian minorities are entitled to bilingual schools in designated geographical areas, which means that the number of these schools is limited (cf. Kinda-Berlakovic 2005). Otherwise, the role of languages in the Austrian education system follows general European trends with regard to foreign language education policy. First of all, foreign language learning may, and often does, start early in the pre-primary sector and has been compulsory from the first grade of primary school onwards since 1998/99. Although not mandatory, English is the dominant language taught from pre-school to upper secondary education, so that almost all Austrian pupils will learn English, which is therefore THE first foreign language in the country. Innovative approaches to language education such as CLIL rarely integrate languages other than English. As to the learning of further foreign languages, the Romance languages, particularly French, followed by Italian and Spanish (the latter growing steadily), are in the lead. Russian is currently seeing a modest growth in upper secondary schools and there are plans to introduce Chinese. Minority and immigrant languages like Serbian, Bosnian or Turkish, however, are rarely learned within the formal education system in Austria (though they may be offered as L1 support for immigrants' L1 development).

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How many languages pupils will eventually learn largely depends on the type of school they attend. In compulsory lower secondary education (*Allgemeinbildende Pflichtschule*, *Hauptschule*) all students are taught English, but only about 10% are offered a second foreign language. In 2005/06 a change in the curriculum of the academically oriented secondary schools (*Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schule*, *Gymnasium*) finally allowed students to replace Latin with a modern language (usually French) at grade 7. Now, almost 10% of pupils in these schools start their second foreign language at this stage, though a larger proportion do so at upper secondary level (grade 9). Although multiple language learning is supported in upper secondary education, it is not obligatory across the board and depends on school type as well as individual decisions made by the pupils. In sum, before leaving the Austrian school system at 18 years of age, about one third of students have learned at least one foreign language in addition to English (Haller 2007). In the *Gymnasium* more than half of pupils will have learned two modern foreign languages and may have chosen a third (Haller 2007). Outside the school system several large adult education institutions offer foreign languages for professional and personal development, an offer which is widely taken up by people adding third or fourth languages to their plurilingual repertoires. Here, Spanish is the strongest choice after English (Vater 2007).

For historical reasons which persist into the twenty-first century, language teacher education in Austria is divided into two tiers. Primary and lower secondary teachers for compulsory education are trained at Tertiary Colleges of Education, while upper secondary teachers, as well as lower secondary teachers for the more academic school sector, are educated at universities. At the moment, the country is seeing a lively political discussion about school reform in the secondary sector and decisions arising from this are likely to impinge on the organization of teacher education, but things are still in flux at the time of writing (early 2010). For the time being, compartmentalization persists and research activities at the Tertiary Colleges of Education are mostly in their infancy. This effectively limits the number of institutions which are, in principle, concerned with research into language teaching and learning to the five arts and humanities faculties in the country (at the Universities of Graz, Innsbruck, Klagenfurt, Salzburg and Vienna), while the education faculties at these universities have so far tended to work in other areas.

As the above already indicates, the language learning research scene in Austria is small. Its institutional affiliation to philology departments has had the effect that it is also rather compartmentalized by language. It must be noted, however, that the university philology departments have seen a considerable increase in research activity in the area of L2 learning and teaching by a new generation of scholars, a process of which we are only now seeing the first results.[1] For instance, in the autumn of 2007 the first national conference on research into English language teaching was organized by the University of Klagenfurt; in 2009 an international research conference on language teaching and language teacher education took place at the University of Vienna; and there is a new series of annual postgraduate conferences on language learning and teaching research. Further recent developments provide evidence

[1] The number of MA and PhD theses on language learning and teaching topics has increased considerably over the last few years and illustrates the immense grass-roots interest among young scholars which is, however, only just beginning to leave a mark on the staffing decisions of research institutions.

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for the current dynamism of this area: the founding of an association of language didactics in 2007 (www.oegsd.at); the creation of a new chair in 'Language teaching and language learning' at the University of Vienna; the establishment of *Fachdidaktische Zentren* (centres of language didactics) at the Universities of Vienna, Graz and Klagenfurt); new research units with a focus on plurilingualism and language teaching at the Universities of Graz and Salzburg; as well as the Language Testing Centre (University of Klagenfurt). All these innovations are, of course, so recent that their effects have not yet really been felt.

The country's applied linguistics association (www.verbal.at) is currently home to a lively L2 learning and teaching research community which figures prominently at the annual national linguistics conference. The association also has a book series (*Sprache im Kontext*, Peter Lang) in which several studies on L2 learning have recently been published. The main national journals that also publish research articles on language teaching and language learning are *Erziehung und Unterricht* and *Moderne Sprachen*. There are also some active language teacher organizations that invite researchers to present their work.[2] On the whole, however, professional language learning and language teaching researchers in Austria have been strongly oriented towards international contacts and international dissemination of their work; as a result, much of that work is published with international publishers, especially in Germany, but also elsewhere.

3. Language education policy

In Austrian research on language teaching, language education policy plays a particularly important role. In the period reported on here, much of the discussion within the research community was dominated by the Council of Europe's *Language Education Policy Profile* (LEPP)[3] during which multilingualism emerged as the key concept (bm:ukk, bmw_f & ÖSZ 2008). The final language conference in December 2008, which marked the end of the LEPP process and brought together a wide range of Austrian experts in linguistics and language teaching, was entitled *Unsere Gesellschaft ist mehrsprachig – unsere Bildung auch?* ('Our society is multilingual – our education too?'). Its objective was to initiate the development of a national curriculum framework for languages. The conference report contains a wide range of recommendations, such as encouraging networking across the different types of schools, integrating multilingualism and appropriate pedagogic approaches in (further) teacher training and education, or capitalizing on already existing multilingualism (ÖSZ & bm:ukk 2009).

[2] *ÖDAF* (Österreichischer Verband für Deutsch als Fremdsprache/Zweitsprache), *WGDa*F (Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft für Deutsch als Fremdsprache), *APFA* (Association des Professeurs de Français en Autriche), *AAPE* (Asociación Austriaca de Profesores de Español), *VRÖ* (Verband der Russischlehrer Österreichs), *TEA* (Teachers of English in Austria), *ÖGSD* (Österreichische Gesellschaft für Sprachdidaktik). These associations also publish journals or newsletters that feature research results on a more or less regular basis: *ÖDAF Mitteilungen*, *Apfascope*, *Miscelánea*, *Mitteilungen für Lehrer slawischer Sprachen*, *ELT News*. Furthermore, *VIEWZ*, the online *Vienna English Working Papers and Studies* published by Vienna University's English Department, has featured several special issues as well as regular articles concerning research into language teaching and learning (www.univie.ac.at/Anglistik/ang_new/online_papers/views.html).

[3] www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Profils_EN.asp

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These recommendations mirror those made by Austrian linguists such as Brigitta Busch, Rudolf de Cillia and Hans-Jürgen Krumm (e.g. de Cillia 2005, 2008a, 2008b; Krumm 2005; Busch 2008; Gombos 2008), who have repeatedly criticized the Austrian education system and language instruction at school for their propagation of a culture of monolingualism that does not take into account the potential of pupils who have different skills in different languages. Krumm (2005) notes in this connection that the multilingual tradition of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and its education policies do not seem to have left a trace in Austrian language education policies.[4] Rather, the Austrian school system aims at foreign-language bilingualism, and the majority of children choose English for that purpose. The inherent multilingualism of a considerable part of the student body, however, is neither recognized nor exploited. Lessons in students' mother tongues or family languages are optional and, frequently, parents do not support the child in his/her learning of the home language (Brizić 2006, 2007). As a consequence, linguists have called for a change in the order (and status) of school languages (e.g. de Cillia 2008a) both in terms of providing proper support for first languages other than German and validating multilingualism, but also with regard to the distribution of resources given to foreign languages at school. Of course, this raises several issues which need to be addressed, such as the generally low status of immigrant languages, the high status of English, and the different ways in which people use and identify with these languages, as well as the emphasis on Romance over Slavic languages in the curriculum. It is clear that, with reference to these factors, English is a special case. This has led Seidlhofer (e.g. 2003, 2004) to suggest that English, as the global lingua franca, should be re-assigned a role in foreign language curricula that is distinct from other foreign languages.

A heated debate of a different kind was kindled by the 2006 *Settlement and Residence Act*, which introduced the so-called 'integration agreement',[5] as a means to deal with societal pressures regarding immigration. The integration agreement has been heavily criticized for stipulating obligatory language courses and language tests, non-attendance at which is penalized (Krumm 2006). Rather, it is suggested, a fruitful integration of immigrants might be achieved by providing opportunities for the development of multiple identities and respecting diversity (e.g. Krumm 2006; further critique in Blaschitz & de Cillia 2008; Plutzar 2008). It is not denied, however, that language teaching serves an important function in the process of integration, but it cannot be a replacement for an active and sensible integration policy. The sensible realization of political demands as concrete educational measures is also discussed by researchers (e.g. Fritz & Faistauer 2008), a discussion to which Henry Widdowson (cf. 2003) has frequently provided direct personal input within the Austrian context. Among such concrete educational measures are the development of portfolios for the teaching of both the mother tongue and the foreign language (e.g. Plutzar & Haslinger 2005) and the use of curricula developed for the teaching of L2 German in publicly funded courses (cf. Fritz et al. 2006). In Vienna, for instance, the city council, in collaboration with local adult

[4] Compare Eder's (2006) analysis of historical language education policy documents in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.
[5] The integration agreement covers the acquisition of knowledge of the German language, particularly the acquisition of reading and writing skills, in order to obtain qualifications for participation in social, economic and cultural life in Austria (§ 14(1)). It includes two modules with a total of 375 hours. Level A2 of the CEFR should be reached, which is tested with an appropriate exam.

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education centres, offers easily accessible German courses for mothers of school-age children (*Mama lernt Deutsch*), who otherwise attend regular German courses extremely rarely. Another kind of course addresses recently immigrated adolescents (*StartVienna-Courses*). Both courses may be attended on a voluntary basis and provide important support for integration in addition to language acquisition. In the *Mama lernt Deutsch* classes, mothers learn German at their children's schools in separately offered courses whose contents are closely linked to their current life situation. The courses not only convey knowledge of German but also give the women the opportunity to develop their self-confidence and autonomy. The aim of the *StartVienna* German courses for adolescents is to support young immigrants in the acquisition of basic language skills and to offer them access to further education and training. These educational opportunities have been evaluated, with reports showing that such voluntary and group-specific offers are indeed taken up as opportunities for learning and integration (Fritz 2008; Dorostkar, Blaschitz & de Cillia 2009).

Another field of research within the scope of language policy, and specifically within the field of German as a foreign language, explores the position of German in the world and the significance of German as a language that is pluricentric and plurinational (Germany, Switzerland, Austria) (de Cillia 2009). In this context the following studies are worthy of note: an overview on the research undertaken by Muhr (2006) and Markhardt (2005), who examined the status of German among translators and interpreters in the EU. Ransmayer (2006), who conducted a survey on the acceptance and prestige of Austrian German at 23 universities in the United Kingdom, France, the Czech Republic and Hungary, noted a significant image problem, in that Austrian German is considered to be non-standard rather than an alternative norm. However, this attitude is stronger in countries to the west of Austria than among Austria's (north)eastern neighbours. Against the background of the pluricentric character of French, Pöll (2005) questions the notion of '*français standard*' ('standard French'). Ilić-Marković (no date), on the other hand, investigates the recent diversification of what had been one language into the three national standards of Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian and the reverberations of this development on foreign language teaching contexts as well as L1 support classes.

Since 2005, Austrian Sign Language (ÖGS – *Österreichische Gebärdensprache*) has also been officially recognized as a language of a non-ethnic minority (Constitution; Article 8, Paragraph 3). The studies by Krausneker (2004, 2006) and Schalber (Krausneker & Schalber 2007) examine the psycho-social situation of deaf people and also investigate how the written and verbal competence of deaf children develops in bilingual school settings. The research includes an evaluation of a specific bilingual school programme.

4. Multilingualism

Language teaching research agendas in Austria clearly reflect the recent trend towards research into multilingualism. This increased interest may be seen in relation to two developments which are not restricted to Austria: first, the efforts within European language policymaking by bodies, such as the Council of Europe, to encourage and foster

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individual[6] and social multilingualism; and second, an increasing awareness of existing multilingualism within schools.

These developments can be seen as the main driving forces behind a rich and active research agenda into multilingualism,[7] with four discernible research foci:

1. individual multilingualism as an asset
2. multilingualism and minorities (regional and immigrant)
3. multilingualism as a contribution to linguistic and cultural diversity
4. multilingualism and language awareness.

These four areas are closely interrelated and also relate to other topics mentioned in this paper, such as teacher education, intercultural aspects, and early learning of English.

Multilingualism as an asset – a positive attribute of either individuals or societies – is by far the widest and most diversified research area, as it relates to specific (neuro-)linguistic, pedagogic and policy aspects of teaching and learning more than two languages. Jessner's contribution to theoretically conceptualizing the learning and acquisition of more than two languages is a case in point; her research has strong international links and is widely accessible (e.g. Herdina & Jessner 2002; Jessner 2006, 2008a, 2008b). Jessner criticizes the monolingual norms dominant in linguistics and argues for more realistic models of multiple language acquisition and learning. Following dynamic systems theory, she conceives of multilingualism as a dynamic, non-linear and reversible process.

Complementary to Jessner's use of local data to illustrate general theory, Ender (2007) applies general theory to clarify local multilingual learning and teaching scenarios. Ender's participants are German-speaking learners of French, who are also competent in at least English. She examines their lexical processing strategies when reading a text for comprehension, as well as the relevance of those strategies for vocabulary acquisition. Her data sets show that intensive processing and lexical anchoring through interlingual and intralingual associations are the most beneficial strategies for vocabulary acquisition. Ender also stresses the importance of strategy training. Her research setting is typical of Austrian L3 studies, which often investigate Romance languages, since these constitute the most important second foreign languages in Austrian schools (Volgger 2007; Cali, Stegu & Vetter 2009). Incidentally, many of the studies on English, which are discussed in later sections of this article (see sections 5 and 6), also have a bearing on the topic at hand. Although Austrian pupils frequently opt for 'English only', learning English as their only foreign language (Haller 2007), and would thus be classified as bilinguals rather than multilinguals, these studies do not necessarily lack a multilingualism component as many of the children involved learn English as their L3. It can be argued that learning English early or by means of CLIL is likely to prepare the ground and create space for other languages in the curriculum, and can thus be interpreted as a contribution to accepting the challenge of multilingualism (e.g. Buchholz 2007a; see also Smit 2005). Early learning of English can, however, also be seen as an

[6] 'Plurilingualism' is the term favoured by the Council of Europe.

[7] Austrian researchers have been members of two major European research networks during this period: *Languages in a Network of European Excellence* (LINEE; www.linee.info) and *Language Dynamics and Management of Diversity* (DYLAN; http://dylan.univie.ac.at).

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obstacle to further foreign language learning, because knowing the lingua franca – English – is often deemed enough. De Cillia (2008a) argues strongly for a national language education curriculum which ensures that valuable potential for plurilingualism is not abandoned in favour of English. One cornerstone of such a curriculum could be Seidlhofer's argument that English should no longer be treated as 'a foreign language' but should rather be assigned to a category of its own as the current global lingua franca, a status which has triggered types of appropriation in learners/users that are distinct from striving for native-speaker-likeness, and where notions of 'target culture' are becoming increasingly irrelevant. Other target languages could then be given a clearer curricular position, fulfilling the function of foreign language learning in order to foster appreciation of another culture (see Seidlhofer 2004, 2007). One viable avenue in this direction regarding neighbouring languages is pointed out by Newerkla (e.g. 2007, 2008), namely a pedagogy focusing on areal features which Austrian German shares with several Slavic languages and Hungarian.

Envisaging a school system with a differentiated multilingual 'habitus' that also validates first languages other than German would naturally require teachers to have specific relevant competences. For the time being, however, monolingual teacher training is the norm in Austria. This has been strongly criticized (Vetter 2008b) and, indeed, an innovative multilingual model of teacher training has been developed at the University of Innsbruck (Hinger et al. 2005; Hinger 2007). This model overcomes the monolingual tradition of training language teachers: future teachers of English, Romance and Slavic languages attend 'umbrella' courses in which principles and theories of teaching, learning, assessment and evaluation are taught. Any further endeavours in this direction should take heed of Vetter's findings in a study on the language awareness of teachers (Vetter 2008a), where she examined the predisposition of language teachers at the secondary level to adopt multilingualism as the objective of their teaching. Her multi-methods approach shows that, although the cognitive component of teachers' awareness is compatible with the state of the art of multilingualism research, teachers perpetuate the monolingual 'habitus'. The reason for this seems to be that, on the emotional dimension, multilingualism remains a pale and merely functional concept which lacks the emotionally laden associations of the single language. She also shows that language learning experience makes a difference. To put it very simply, how 'multilingual' teachers teach depends greatly on the learning experiences they have had themselves. From that finding Vetter derives the importance of cross-linguistic learning experiences, for instance in teacher education.

Expanding more on the notion of language awareness, three dimensions can be distinguished in this area: the role of awareness in multilinguals (Jessner 2006), norm awareness (Wochele & Stegu 2006; Wochele 2008) and the self-concept of learners (Cali 2008) and teachers (Vetter 2008a) in multilingual contexts. Jessner (2006) differentiates between two types of awareness: metalinguistic awareness (awareness about language as such) and crosslinguistic awareness (awareness of the interaction between the languages in a multilingual's mind), both of which should be taken into consideration when defining and testing multilingual proficiency. As to norm awareness, Wochele examines the evaluation of written productions in a third language (Italian and French) by teachers and linguistically naïve native speakers. In her analysis of the self-concept of highly multilingual learners at the Diplomatic Academy, Cali (2008) shows that these learners expect a certain degree of

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multilingualism from their teachers and the classroom setting, and that they also attach great importance to learner autonomy.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, a second focus of multilingualism research is regional and immigrant minorities, with several Austrian researchers pleading for an inclusive approach towards multilingualism which integrates all languages: those of regional minorities or of immigrants as well as traditional foreign languages (e.g. Krumm 2005; Busch 2008; de Cillia 2008a). Of Austria's regional minorities, the Slovene minority in Carinthia, where regional minority issues remain an emotionally laden and extremely contentious topic, has received most attention (Busch 2006; Kuri & Busch 2009). Feinig's study, for example, traces the development of Carinthian bilingual schooling (Feinig 2008). Not least because of the number of people affected, however, other topics in this general area have received more attention: L2 German as a second language and as the language of education (e.g. Schmölzer-Eibinger 2008a; Krumm 2009; Schmölzer-Eibinger & Langer 2009) and also the roles and functions of the immigrants' other languages (Akkuş, Brizić & de Cillia 2005). In this context, Boeckmann (2008) differentiates between the manifold acquisition contexts and the functions of so-called second languages and reveals three common misconceptions about them. The first is that the languages of origin of L2 speakers and learners are minority languages. This is not necessarily the case. Immigrants may actually constitute local majorities, as is the case in classrooms where most of the pupils have non-German mother tongues. The second misconception is that survey data about pupils' L1s and L2s can be relied on: in fact, Boeckmann argues, it should be examined very critically, since some languages (such as those which are minority languages in the countries of origin) tend to be hidden (cf. Brizić 2007). And finally, Boeckmann argues that the distinction between L1 and L2 is not as simple and evident as often assumed. He therefore opts for a more differentiated stock-taking of the linguistic needs of L2 learners in order to achieve more efficiency in L2 teaching. Similarly, Busch (2007) argues for a learner-centred, non-normative approach which recognizes the heterogeneous linguistic backgrounds of the learners. The development of multi-variety materials should help to valorize all languages in the classroom in order to make the 'multivoicedness' of society visible. At the methodological level, the biographical approach is considered as highly promising (Busch 2006; Krumm 2009).

5. Early language learning in the classroom

Children from homes with languages other than German constitute a very important group of early language learners in primary classrooms, accounting for 20% of primary pupils nationwide in 2009 (in Vienna the percentage was 48%). The sociolinguistic implications of these circumstances and the fact that Austrian society has generally been reluctant to acknowledge its changing fabric have already been discussed in sections 3 and 4. There is, however, also a major study furnishing actual acquisitional data on L2 German (Peltzer-Karpf et al. 2006).

The study is noteworthy not least for its longitudinal design: it accompanied a cohort of students (N = 106) through their four years of elementary education. This type of study is often described as 'desirable' in research circles but seldom carried out (but see Peltzer-Karpf

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& Zangl 1998). Children from four L1-groups – Turkish (N = 26), Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian (BCS; N = 40), German (N = 27), other languages as L1 (N = 13) – were observed and tested in German and their first languages at regular intervals over four years, covering all aspects of language competence. Turkish and BCS L1 control groups in the respective countries of origin were also included in the study. In accordance with the theoretical foundations of the research (neurobiological dynamic systems), the findings chart the developmental trajectories of the children, showing a detailed progressive differentiation and elaboration of the various linguistic subsystems mediated by a dynamic interplay between the languages. The findings are too numerous to discuss in detail so we will restrict ourselves to pointing out major trends:

- Although control groups in the countries of origin were matched as closely as possible for socio-economic background, the L1 acquisition of the Austrian Turkish and BCS speakers clearly lags behind their peers in the countries of origin in all respects.
- First language literacy, in particular, is often lacking altogether, the situation being somewhat better in the Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian community than in the community of Turkish origin.
- The former two points are highly significant, as progress in the acquisition of L2 German depends crucially on an individual's L1 development.
- Because of the intense exposure to German in school, the L2 soon begins to interact with the L1 system, implying that both remain in a turbulent state for significant periods of time.
- Children who had attended pre-school or kindergarten had an L2 advantage over those who had not.

The results of this longitudinal acquisition study show that the language development of immigrant children in Austria is characterized by circumstances and conditions similar to those found to hold elsewhere (e.g. Cummins 1991). The grounding of these results in the local context has, however, meant that at least some of the recommendations made by the authors of the study have found their way into policy decisions. The researchers' significant pedagogical recommendations revolve around the idea that despite the widespread belief in the 'power of naturalistic acquisition' children should receive explicit and focussed language instruction in their first language as well as German L2, which would necessitate, among other things, new elements in teacher education. Pending such developments, however, the realization that participation in pre-school education tends to have a very positive impact on later L2 trajectories has made its way to the policy level. The final kindergarten year (ages 5–6) is now obligatory and free of charge, making it more attractive for economically disadvantaged families to enrol their children; the fact that this measure chimes with a more general demand for expanding the provision of day-care for pre-schoolers has doubtless furthered this cause.

An important derivative product of the Peltzer-Karpf group's research into early language learning (the German L2 study was preceded by a study on the acquisition of EFL in a bilingual programme, see Peltzer-Karpf & Zangl 1998) is a compendium of language testing tools and formats that can be used for the assessment of young learners (Zangl & Peltzer-Karpf 1997). It is written in an accessible style for a readership without a background in language acquisition research, so that it can also serve as a handbook for practising teachers

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who want to assess the L2 learning progress of their pupils in an informed manner (but see Buchholz's (2007a) finding, discussed below, that assessment is largely absent from foreign language learning at primary level). This established expertise in testing young learners might have served the educational sector in Austria very well when a mandatory language status check-up for pre-schoolers (15 months before school entry) was introduced in 2008, but it has not been exploited as well as one might have wished. A research-based project developing appropriate testing instruments has, however, since been installed (Breit 2009), the sequence of events (i.e. first introduce a procedure by legislation, then think about how it can be implemented while practitioners are already required to act in accordance with it) being symptomatic of Austrian educational language policy and its relationship to the research community. Historically, there has been considerable reluctance among Austrian educational policy makers to use Austrian-based (or indeed any) applied linguistics research expertise as a resource for checking realities and supporting a sustainable implementation of policies, but we are confident that the situation is improving.

That the lack of dialogue between policy makers and researchers may result in unfortunate disparities between policy goals and realities on the ground is witnessed by the situation of early foreign language education in the primary sector. Austria was among the very first countries in Europe to introduce foreign languages into primary education.[8] Primary curricula anticipate that global aims such as 'intercultural encounters' and 'language learning motivation' should emerge from integrating the foreign language into other curricular areas.[9] There is a range of eight languages that may officially be taught (English, French, Italian, Croatian, Slovak, Slovenian, Czech and Hungarian) but the dominance of English is strong (some would say stifling) and the only research to report on is, in fact, on EFL.

Before the nation-wide introduction of EFL throughout the primary years, a number of research projects in the 1990s had investigated the implementation of 'Early English' programmes in specific contexts, above all in the capital city Vienna, and with encouraging results (Felberbauer & Seebauer 1994; Seebauer 1997; Duffek 1999). While the general parameters of these minimal contact programmes (around one hour per week, no L2 peer group, and taught by primary teachers with L1 German) were the same as in the later nationwide model, a crucial difference lay in the fact that these were pilot projects taught by specially motivated and well-prepared teachers. The learning outcomes after four years of this *Lollipop Programme* showed that learners had reached approximately the level of students involved in a German–English dual language programme at the end of their first year (cf. Peltzer-Karpf & Zangl 1998). This is particularly interesting in the light of the fact that the results of the Peltzer-Karpf group indicated that the critical mass of lexical storage which precipitates a reorganization of the L2 system into a more analytic and autonomous state is reached during the second year of the dual language programme investigated by them. In other words, primary EFL teaching of the low contact variety does not take learners beyond the lexical memorization stage, even if provided by highly motivated and competent teachers.

[8] ISCED level 1; year 1–4.There were already pilot projects in the 1960s. One weekly hour of foreign language teaching (FLT) in year 3 and 4 has been obligatory since 1983. FLT in years 1–4 was made obligatory in the school year 2002–03.
[9] www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/14053/vs_lp_8_lebende_fremdsprache.pdf.

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This conclusion is fully supported as well as considerably extended by Buchholz's (2007a) evaluation of foreign language provision in Austrian primary schools (98.6% of which concerns English; see also Buchholz 2007b). The starting point of her work was the observation that several years into the full implementation of primary English in Austria, a considerable gap exists between claims made in policy and curricular documents and the practice and outcomes of primary foreign language teaching. The goals of Buchholz's multi-method study were to establish facts about primary EFL teaching processes, outcomes and stakeholder views, as well as to inquire into the reasons for the observed shortcomings and to make suggestions for improvement. This was a large-scale study involving 150 schools and 1,245 individuals in total. Quantitative methods were complemented by classroom observations and interviews with different groups of stakeholders, including pupils. A further component of the study was a language test administered to three fourth-year classes (N = 66). In the present context we limit our discussion to the findings that seem most significant to us.

Despite the status of EFL as a mandatory part of the primary curriculum, the reality in schools shows the general attitude of teachers towards it to be somewhat non-committal: while some are almost hostile, others see the principal (and often only) goal for learners to have 'fun'. This may explain why songs and rhymes are by far the most common teaching strategy used. Actual classroom time spent on the foreign language remains well below the presumed one hour per week overall. The language and content integration stipulated by the curriculum is rarely found. Buchholz argues that, contrary to their practice in other aspects of the primary curriculum (such as literacy or mathematics), the teachers seldom offer coherent and didactically-informed EFL classes. Those lessons that ARE based on long-term planning tend to be teacher-centred, with few opportunities for learners to engage in meaningful FL interaction. Learner utterances remain without feedback and learning outcomes are not assessed. Buchholz's study (2007a) also shows that ultimate attainment after four years of primary English remains below the curricular aims for the majority of pupils, although the actual range of attainment is considerable. Teachers have only a vague picture of their learners' FL skills and systematically overestimate them (a state of affairs which tends to be fully echoed in policy statements). Interestingly, the learners themselves have a much more realistic view of their own achievements at the end of the four primary years and in retrospect judge EFL at primary school to be 'boring'. Despite the significant increase in pressure, pupils report a preference for secondary-school English (Buchholz 2007a).

Buchholz considers her results to be a sobering re-assessment of the optimistic findings produced by the special projects studies of the 1990s (Felberbauer & Seebauer 1994; Seebauer 1997; Duffek 1999). Discussing the reasons, Buchholz identifies a dilemma: while these disappointing results do depend very much on the teachers (since some teachers can produce excellent results), these teachers cannot really influence the circumstances in which they work (Buchholz 2007b) and we agree with Buchholz that these circumstances are the product of over-ambitious policy making together with unrealistic educational planning. Primary school teachers are simply not well prepared to teach a foreign language; many of them also do not know English well enough, while the teaching of other languages is extremely unlikely. Buchholz's suggestion for a way out of the dilemma is to create a special teacher position of responsibility: the primary (foreign) language teaching specialist (2007a) – a solution that

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is successfully practised in several other European countries. Buchholz's conclusion echoes claims reported on above: only a proper language curriculum spanning the entire educational career of pupils can ensure that resources invested in the early years yield the desired results at the later stages.

6. Second or foreign language as the medium of learning

The demographic and socio-political trends of the final decades of the twentieth century (especially mass immigration and globalization) have undermined the monolingual traditions of the Austrian education system much as they have in numerous other developed countries. The integration of immigrant populations has become an issue (see also section 4) and so has the pressure to expand the use of the international lingua franca, English, beyond traditional foreign language classes within mainstream education. In both circumstances we are dealing with students using a second or third language as a medium of learning, so there is a core set of shared issues. It is for this reason that the present section deals with both situations.

6.1 L2 discourse competence

The theme of discourse competence has drawn some attention in recent years from various perspectives: researchers have looked at the development of oral narrative competence in L1 from oracy to literacy (Dannerer 2009); others have compared oral narratives in L1 and a foreign language (Hüttner & Rieder-Bünemann 2008). The strongest focus, however, has been directed at the significance of literacy skills for formal learning and educational success, the latter research focus being motivated by the presence of large and still increasing numbers of L2 speakers in Austrian classrooms. Its relevance for L1 majority language learners, especially in a sociolinguistic context such as Austria, where dialect differences between home and school may be considerable, is obvious, as is its relevance for CLIL classrooms (see section 6.2). In their approach, Portmann-Tselikas & Schmölzer-Eibinger (2008) have slightly adapted Cummins' two-dimensional model of academic language use (Cummins 1991), reinterpreting his context-dependence/independence cline as a textual dimension which ranges from dialogic orientation to textual integration. Cummins's second dimension, 'cognitive complexity', is reinterpreted as representing the thematic orientation of the discourse, ranging from everyday life experience to systematic abstract knowledge. The authors carefully delineate the developmental trajectories experienced by individual speakers in the course of their pre-school and in-school socialization, from basic interpersonal interaction about everyday experience via narrative and oral inquiry towards highly literate texts about systematic knowledge, showing that the typical activities at each stage are not maximally distinct but actually flow from and influence each other. The last stage in the development (highly textually integrated, context-reduced, cognitively demanding language use on abstract and systematic topics) is designated as '*Textkompetenz*' ('textual competence') by Portmann-Tselikas and Schmölzer-Eibinger, involving the ability to a) understand written texts, relate their content to personal experience and act upon the insights gained from

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reading and b) create written texts which adequately convey insights, thoughts and intentions to third parties (Portmann-Tselikas 2005). We cannot discuss here in detail the conceptual undercurrents to notions like LITERACY and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency), but the work done by Portmann-Tselikas and Schmölzer-Eibinger is clearly relevant to both. Based on this conceptual groundwork, a fully elaborated didactic model intended to support students on their way towards academic language use is presented in Schmölzer-Eibinger (2008a, 2008b). Her 'three-phase-model of textual competence didactics' uses procedures and activities best known from the teaching of foreign language reading and writing in order to encourage knowledge construction during content-subject lessons. The multilingual and multicultural situation in current classrooms is an explicit part of the model, but its didactic cornerstones are relevant everywhere: this is a learner-centred approach where knowledge and understanding of subject-specific concepts emerge from processes of negotiation within the social sphere of the learning group (student–student, student–teacher). The three phases of the model incorporate oral and written activities, but the focus as such is on work with written texts. Phase one aims at activation of existing knowledge. Phase two concentrates on the interaction with subject-texts in the shape of (re)construction and expansion. Phase three aims at synthesis and transfer to other contexts (i.e. the ability to act upon the new knowledge gained). A rich and well-structured portfolio of activities triggers intensive learning processes directed towards language and content simultaneously, enabling learners (some of them for the first time) to communicate about abstract concepts and to learn from texts at school. This didactic model confronts a school reality where elaborate interaction with texts and especially writing is largely absent in content subjects (see, for example, Dalton-Puffer 2007). The articles by Schmölzer-Eibinger (2008b) and Schmölzer-Eibinger & Langer (2009) present concrete suggestions for implementing such practices in history and chemistry lessons respectively. That such a language-sensitive approach might indeed be a way forward is supported by Mohr's (2005, 2007) interview study of highly successful immigrant pupils: in addition to explicit language work evolving from subject content at upper secondary level, these students identified their positive attitude towards L2 learning and their high self-expectations as decisive factors in their success at school.

The specific competences required by academic language use are often experienced as problematic by university students, whether papers have to be written in the L1 or (as they are increasingly) in English, but it is only recently that Austrian researchers have responded to these issues. As a general outlook on the orientation of this research it can be said that recent work in this area has been strongly informed by notions of genre, connected to both the systemic functional and ESP approaches. Hüttner (2007, 2008) conducted an extended genre analysis of the move structure of typical student papers written in L2 English, as well as a corpus analysis of the functions of formulaic language use. Based on this, a model of student research papers as a genre in its own right was developed. The study included a control group of students receiving genre-oriented writing instruction, with very positive results in terms of quality of overall structure. While Hüttner's study focused on students writing in English, the contributors to Doleschal & Gruber's collection (2007) investigated differences – which can be considerable – across several European academic discourse cultures. L1 student writing in business and social science degree courses has been investigated by Helmut Gruber's research group (Gruber et al. 2006). This multi-perspective study explored textual macro-structure,

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coherence, intertextuality, argumentation, modality and the lexicon. Another important aim of the project was to identify ways in which both students and lecturers can be equipped with conceptual tools for reflection on textual products, and an on-line writing curriculum has been developed as a result.[10]

6.2 Content and Language Integrated Learning

As in many other countries, the use of a foreign language in content subjects (in practice, the language almost always being English) has been on the agenda in Austrian mainstream education since the early 1990s.[11] However, it is only since about 2002 that research has finally responded to the demand for theoretically and empirically guided knowledge in this area, and a significant number of publications have become available in the 2004–2009 period. Austrian researchers have spearheaded international networking of CLIL research in applied linguistics through conferences, publications and the organization of the International Applied Linguistics Association (AILA) CLIL Research Network.[12] Much of their work is internationally accessible and will not be discussed here. CLIL research in Austria is structured into four areas:

1. Surveys about CLIL implementation
2. Learning outcomes
3. Studies on classroom discourse and learning processes
4. Didactics of CLIL.

6.2.1 Surveys about CLIL implementation

While CLIL has predominantly been a grassroots movement in Austria, the education authorities are clearly positively disposed towards it. However, no comprehensive survey of CLIL in Austria has been commissioned so far, even though an overall evaluation of the undertaking would be enthusiastically received. There are a few exceptions: Mewald's (2004) multi-focus study on general lower secondary CLIL in the province of Lower Austria, a survey of general lower secondary CLIL in the province of Upper Austria (Gierlinger, Hainschink & Spann 2007), and a nationwide survey of CLIL in colleges of engineering, arts and crafts (Dalton-Puffer et al. 2008). All studies bear witness to two facts about CLIL in Austria: a) the contextual specificity and resulting unpredictability of CLIL provision in Austrian schools, and b) the absence of coherent policy guidelines at all levels, resulting in a tension between practitioners' wishes to be given clear aims as well as structural and conceptual support, and their desire to preserve their operational autonomy in day-to-day teaching and planning.

[10] See project website: www.univie.ac.at/linguistics/personal/helmut/Schreibprojekt/en/publikationen.htm.
[11] In this article we will refer to this type of educational provision as CLIL (*Content and Language Integrated Learning*), although the Austrian scene has until recently been dominated by the terms EAA (*Englisch als Arbeitssprache/English as a working language*) and EAC (*English across the curriculum*).
[12] *AILA Research Network on CLIL and Immersion Classrooms* (www.ichm.org/clil).

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The need for transparency and explicitness in CLIL provision is underscored by an interview study among upper secondary students (Dalton-Puffer et al. 2009). The empowering and motivating effect of CLIL on parts of the teaching community is another clear result of all the studies reported on here, as is the need for specific CLIL teacher education.

6.2.2 Learning outcomes

The core of Mewald's CLIL study (2004, 2007) consists of a thorough investigation of language learning outcomes, employing both classroom observation and language testing methodologies (N = 72). Mewald's results prefigure those published internationally since (see Dalton-Puffer, Nikula & Smit 2010, for an overview): her lower secondary students show significant gains on the affective level, which results in higher creativity and risk-taking behaviour in learners. Gains in learner production are most pronounced in terms of lexical range, spoken fluency and accuracy (the latter also in writing), while CLIL learners show little difference from mainstreamers in terms of syntactic complexity. This, Mewald argues, probably has its roots in the characteristic structures of the classroom talk that is students' main input (see also below). The textual and pragmatic appropriacy of student writing is focused on by Jexenflicker (2008) in a study comparing CLIL and mainstream students in higher colleges of engineering. It is evident that the advantages of CLIL students on the discourse level are far less pronounced than on that of micro-level competences (e.g. morphosyntax or spelling), if they exist at all. It is argued that the development of communicative competence in CLIL students cannot be left to naturalistic acquisition alone but needs explicit classroom work (cf. Schmölzer-Eibinger 2008a, 2008b, discussed above).

6.2.3 Studies on classroom discourse and learning processes

Two book-length studies chart the conditions of language use in classrooms where a foreign language and lingua franca are used as medium of instruction at secondary (Dalton-Puffer 2007) and tertiary level (Smit 2008). The two studies employ discourse analytic and ethnographic (Smit) methodologies, showing how the language environment in both cases is conditioned by the socio-pragmatic forces in the respective contexts. Both studies are accessible as international book publications and will not be discussed further here. Smit and Dalton-Puffer have also edited a series of workshop reports giving access to classroom-based CLIL research conducted internationally and by their graduate students.[13] The Austrian studies give insights into topics such as the complexity of teacher feedback and student response moves in CLIL compared to EFL lessons, the use of vocabulary teaching strategies by EFL and subject-only teachers in CLIL lessons, CLIL assessment practices, and the experiences of mathematics teachers when teaching through the medium of English.

[13] Three on-line issues of *VIEWS* (*Vienna English Working Papers and Studies*) present current empirical work from Austria and abroad: http://anglistik.univie.ac.at/views/archive/.

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6.2.4 Didactics in CLIL

In search of didactic principles that support true integration of content and language learning in CLIL, Orkisz Lang's (2009) dissertation identifies inquiry-based teaching as a viable approach. In her comparative case-study of two lower secondary school classrooms, it became evident that student-centred inquiry activities, combined with teachers' use of Socratic questioning techniques, triggered significantly larger amounts of higher level thinking, as well as the complex language necessary for expressing this type of thinking. It is postulated that this will lead to better conceptual understanding and further L2 development. On the didactic level the study offers an elaborate grid of CLIL inquiry-based teaching criteria on the language, content and learning dimension. Haider's work on CLIL in German (e.g. Haider & Helten-Pacher 2009) underlines the many parallel challenges faced by students learning and teachers teaching in a foreign or a second language. Importantly, their report points out that subject teachers were significantly sensitized towards language issues in science teaching by an experience of teaching their subject abroad, an issue which relates directly to the matter discussed in the section on L2 discourse competence (cf. section 6.1 of this paper).

7. Interculturality

In the field of language and culture (see, for example, Byram & Feng 2004), the main concern of Austrian authors is sharpening the notions of interculturality, transculturality and cultural context in foreign language teaching, as well as conducting pedagogical work in the area of interculturality (e.g. Boeckmann 2006b, 2007; Eisl 2006, 2008; Delanoy 2007; Furch & Eichelberger 2008).

The contributions of Boeckmann (2006b, 2007) underscore the relevance of empirical research in the area of culture and German as a foreign and second language. He proposes a framework that allows a more systematic assignment of fields of practice and research to the field of interculturality. On the basis of the conceptualization of cultures as communities of communication (Knapp-Potthoff & Liedke 1997), Boeckmann focuses on three main dimensions of interculturality in his analysis. These are: context of learning (the conditions of teaching and learning processes), learning process (interculturality as a process category) and educational goal (interculturality as a target category). These principles are brought to bear on an empirical investigation of the teaching of German as a foreign language in Japan (Boeckmann 2006a), highlighting the problematic nature of transferring foreign language teaching methods wholesale to non-western cultures. Apart from an analysis of the historical and current situation of German teaching in Japan, new methods are developed that are appropriate and practicable for Japanese learners.

The anthology of Furch & Eichelberger (2008) focuses on intercultural activities in diverse pedagogical fields of work in Austria. As well as general contributions to interculturality and intercultural learning there are contributions to specific aspects of culture such as language and language acquisition, religion and ethnic groups. One important emerging argument is that intercultural competences enable learners not only to know more about the 'other' culture, but also about their own cultural background (Eisl 2008). Eisl's doctoral thesis aims

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at narrowing the gap between academic research and practical teaching, and enhancing the professional role of teachers as mediators between target and native language cultures. She understands intercultural skills as a sensitization for multi-perspectivity, a confrontation with stereotype images from within and without, but mainly a differentiating reflection of the foreign, but also the native culture. In the didactic section of her study, she presents a model for a gradual introduction of intercultural competence in the second foreign language, which comprises cognitive and affective activities for intercultural skills.

Delanoy's study on transculturality in English lessons (Delanoy 2008) investigates the way one can deal with transcultural texts and their diverse and different references and examines the importance of integrating foreign literature into teaching. A critical and somewhat pessimistic voice in the debate on interculturality is that of Larcher (2008), who detects an exploitation of the concept of culture for hegemonic purposes that goes hand in hand with a tendency for cultural stereotyping. Larcher recommends the deconstruction of the concept of culture in research and pedagogy. On the basis of an extensive historical analysis he contests the frequently-announced existence of a multicultural society.

8. Classroom methodologies

While school curricula continue to emphasize communicative language teaching as the dominant paradigm, the Austrian language teaching research community has embraced the ethos of the post-method era (e.g. Kumaravadivelu 1994) with its postulate that teaching be based on principles instead of rigid notions of 'method' (Faistauer 2005; Fritz & Faistauer 2008). Under this umbrella, with its wide array of general didactic, methodological and acquisitional principles, recent Austrian research on language teaching methodology has been concerned with mnemonic techniques in foreign language teaching and learning (Brzezinska 2009) and with the use of mirror translations (German–Hungarian) as a learning strategy (Dengscherz 2009). Above all, however, researchers have focused on the following areas: action research, visual culture, eLearning, corpora and pedagogical grammar.

The significance of action research is underscored by Boeckmann (2007), who clarifies relevant terminology and provides guidelines on how action research projects can be implemented. Using the action research paradigm, Reininger (2009) explores how teachers and learners realize, experience and evaluate activities which encourage them to talk about their biographies.

The field of visual culture in the context of foreign language teaching research has been explored by Seidl (2007). The main concern of visual culture is VISUALITY, i.e. the cultural significance of visual experiences. Visual culture assumes that visuals are communicatively relevant in that they both create and maintain meaning. Visual experiences are therefore central in shaping people's understanding of differences, whether between ethnicities or genders. For foreign language teaching, this means that visual education has to be included and that the ability to understand visuals as well as critical viewing can be considered vital skills alongside listening, speaking, reading and writing.

These additional skills are particularly relevant for the use of electronic media, where, in the field of eLearning in language teaching and learning, there is a wide range of rather insular

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attempts to integrate online learning and to develop blended-learning scenarios (Allford & Pachler 2007). The volumes edited by Ollivier & Weiss (2007) and by Boeckmann, Rieder-Bünemann & Vetter (2008) can be considered as substantial attempts to bring together some of these activities. Boeckmann et al. stress in their introduction that there is no need for a new didactics of eLearning, but that eLearning can be successfully integrated into existing didactic approaches. Moreover, they argue that an adequate didactic concept – which is much more important than technical subtleties – has to be the starting point when planning to integrate web- or computer-based scenarios into language teaching.

Three recent collections of articles on specific aspects of foreign language teaching methodology reflect the compartmentalization of the community according to language boundaries: cf. for English Language Teaching the volume edited by Delanoy & Volkmann (2008), and for the teaching of Romance languages Gómez-Pablos & Ollivier (2007) and Tanzmeister (2008). The compartmentalization is transcended by a volume emerging from among the so-called 'smaller languages' edited by Laakso (2008). From the wide range of specific aspects covered we present two. In his approach to a PEDAGOGICAL GRAMMAR, Newby (2008) brings together a communicative, use-based view of language and a cognitive view of language storage and processing: Newby's COGNITIVE + COMMUNICATIVE GRAMMAR starts from the assumption that students are both learners and users of language and therefore recognizes the important role of grammar pedagogy and intentional, conscious learning. It systematizes principles and activities relating to grammar activities and provides for a framework which allows, for instance, for the formulation of grammatical objectives, descriptors and rules, for syllabus design, (self-)assessment, and for the design and evaluation of grammar methodology. The application of computer corpora in language teaching is another issue with a certain tradition in the Austrian research scene. Following the organization of the Teaching and Language Corpora (TALC) conference (Kettemann 2002), a number of projects by language teacher educators have addressed the transfer from corpus linguistics to the language classroom (e.g. Smit & Hüttner 2006 on mini-corpora in English for Specific Purposes). Kaltenböck & Mehlmauer-Larcher (2008) demonstrate how quick and easy access to attested language use and search facilities can offer invaluable advantages, though the questions of representativeness and lack of contextual information may be considered as two shortcomings of using computer corpora for language teaching. The authors problematize pedagogical implications inside and outside the language classroom, such as marking and assessing, material and syllabus design, and discovery learning. Schiftner (2008) expands the circle beyond English language corpora to those available for the teaching and learning of German. Critical issues in the use of corpus linguistics for purposes of language teaching have been repeatedly voiced by Widdowson (e.g. 2003, 2009), who, by virtue of being based in Austria, has had a very direct impact on the Austrian research scene in this and other areas.

9. Testing, assessment and educational standards

Austria is currently undergoing an unprecedented move towards professionalization in language assessment to ensure fairness, comparability and accountability (Schuller 2008).

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The research agenda in this broad area is dominated by the current policy drive towards the development and implementation of educational standards ('*Bildungsstandards*') for foreign languages and the sometimes very critical discussion under way about this standardization process. The foreign language benchmarks are being developed in connection with a permanent large-scale monitoring programme for secondary education, commissioned by the Austrian Ministry of Education and Culture. The standardization process is managed by the *Austrian Institute of Educational Research* (BIFIE) in close cooperation with the government-funded *Austrian Centre for Language Competence* (ÖSZ/ACLC), the *Language Testing Centre* at the University of Klagenfurt, experts from the University of Innsbruck and the Council of Europe's *European Centre of Modern Languages* (ECML) in Graz.[14]

The so-called '*Bildungsstandards*' are defined as basic competences which pupils are expected to possess after a certain number of years of schooling (Year 4 and Year 8), and the intention is to run a tri-annual nationwide test for around 10% of an age cohort in L1 German, mathematics and English. The standards are intended as instruments of quality management in education and should give reliable information about the competences which are generally considered as crucial for the pupil's school career or their future professional activities. They should give feedback to teachers and are thus also considered as a basis for their self-evaluation. Although these standards will not replace but rather complement the curricula, they are likely to initiate a paradigm shift by drawing particular attention to the output (and not the input, for example of materials) of teaching (Rückl & Weger 2008). The standards are based on the level descriptions of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR), which has also been highly influential in the development of the latest generation of foreign language curricula. The standardization process is highly advanced for English (Moser 2007) and mother-tongue German, comprising not only communicative competences such as speaking (Horak & Lang-Heran 2008), but also dynamic competences such as conversation strategies, learning strategies and intercultural competences (Brock, Schatzl, Schlichtherle & Schober 2008). The standards for English were published by Ministerial Decree in January 2009.[15] For Romance languages standards have not yet been developed, but 'competence descriptions' have been published recently (Göschl et al. 2009).[16] In contrast to the standards for English, the competence descriptions for French, Italian and Spanish will not in the foreseeable future be transformed into a nationwide test, but are intended by the ÖSZ/ACLC as the basis for a large-scale evaluation of teaching outcomes and as information for orientation and planning. A first step in this direction is Schweinberger (2009), who reports on a comparative proficiency test involving two different foreign language curricula implemented at a particular school (English compared to French as first foreign languages).

The development of the testing procedures for the L2 English and L1 German standards is well under way. The Standards Tests for English (Year 8) have been developed and validated by the Language Testing Centre in Klagenfurt (Sigott 2004, 2007; Sigott et al. 2007), those for German L1 (Year 4) are currently being constructed. Established in 2005, the Language

[14] Project reports and results are available online at www.bifie.at or www.oesz.at and www.uni-klu.ac.at/ltc.
[15] Verordnung der Bundesministerin für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, BGBl. 1/2009.
[16] A wide range of materials such as model tasks and level descriptions is available for English and the Romance languages at www.oesz.at/fss.

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Testing Centre is now an important centre for testing expertise in the country, and a number of research projects focusing on skills testing and construct identification are currently under way there.[17] In the area of testing German as a foreign or second language Glaboniat (Glaboniat et al. 2005; Glaboniat 2006; in press) has documented and significantly influenced the continuing drive for quality enhancement and professionalization. This is an area that has so far been located outside school education proper and a number of specifically Austrian test instruments for different target-groups have been developed and recently reworked with reference to the CEFR (e.g. *Österreichisches Sprachdiplom Deutsch*). At the level of upper secondary education the 'standardized school-leaving exam' project (*standardisierte Reifeprüfung*, grade level 12) transfers the idea of standardization to upper secondary academic and professional schools and is likely to bring about important changes; pilot studies are being carried out. The same applies to school-entry language diagnostics (more information is available at www.bifie.at; see also Breit 2009). The trend towards standardization is also leaving its mark at tertiary level where an inter-university working group is now developing assessment benchmarks for the language components of the English Studies programmes at Austrian universities. The writing benchmarks for the B.A. exit level have already been published (www.uni-klu.ac.at/ltc/inhalt/430.htm), while Berger (2009) presents a new rating scale for advanced (CEFR: C1 level) speaking skills.

What can already be observed is a process of sensitization and intense discussion. The process of developing standards for languages in Austria has clearly been dominated by questions of testing and assessment (Lucyshyn 2007), but the hegemony of the standardization discourse must not mask the critical voices. Delanoy (2007), for instance, formulates concerns from the perspective of literature and culture. While not rejecting benchmarking in general, he criticizes the backgrounding and imminent disappearance of literature from the foreign language classroom, which he considers as particularly important from an educational perspective.

Self-assessment has also played a noticeable role in the Austrian research and development scene. After the impact of the Council of Europe's *European Language Portfolio*, Austrian experts have worked intensively to implement, evaluate and improve the use of the Portfolio in the foreign language classroom. For school languages, two Portfolios for different age groups are in use (10–15 years, Abuja et al. 2004; 15+, Abuja et al. 2007; 6–10, Felberbauer et al. 2010); there is also a recent version for adult education (VÖV 2007). Materials for teachers (Keiper & Nezbeda 2006; Keiper 2007) and more diversified checklists facilitating the use of the Portfolio (Horak et al. 2006) have also been developed. An evaluation study (Grinner 2007) has examined the implementation of the Portfolio: interviews with teachers who already use the 10–15 version show how marginal the European Portfolio still is in Austrian schools, a fact that underlines the importance of intensified teacher training. Experiential learning of this kind may be facilitated by the implementation of the Council of Europe's *European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages* (EPOSTL), which is currently being piloted in the teacher certification programmes at the Universities of Graz and Vienna (Newby et al. (n.d.); Mehlmauer-Larcher 2010). This portfolio aims to guide student teachers towards reflecting

[17] More information is available on the LTC Klagenfurt website www.uni-klu.ac.at/ltc e.g. LTC Technical Reports 1–4.

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on their knowledge, skills and competences as future language teachers, and to document their progress.

A portfolio of a different kind was developed by Plutzar & Haslinger (2005) with a view to making visible the manifold qualifications, knowledge and skills of recent immigrants and asylum seekers in Austria. Work with the portfolio also encourages users to develop goals and strategies for entering the labour market.

All these developments show that assessment of language proficiency in Austria is now widely based upon the CEFR (Brock et al. 2008), underscoring a long-term move away from writing-based to skills-based assessment. At present, it is not yet clear exactly what impact the various standardization processes we have described will have on school-based assessment and teaching practices in general; a good deal of research is clearly needed in this area in the coming years but Krumm's critique (2008) of the CEFR should not go unheeded. Krumm criticizes the mere pragmatic-functional understanding of language use and its consequences, particularly from the perspective of literature, ignoring as it does the aesthetic quality of texts, and disregarding culture as one of the driving forces of human development. Moreover, he regrets that as a result the plurilingual approach is not adopted either within the Framework's text itself, nor in its general reception, which quite often reduces the Framework to the levels of competence. Hence, the open approach exemplified in the first chapters of the Framework is replaced by a '*prüfungsorientiertes Sprachlehrkonzept*' (an evaluation-driven concept of language teaching).

10. Final remarks

The years 2004–2009 covered in this survey have certainly been a period of dynamic development for Austrian research on language teaching and language learning. The research community has grown considerably and continues to grow, and one may hope that with its current dynamism it is on the way to forming a critical mass in the not too distant future. This, we hope, will motivate language education authorities to make more consistent use of the expertise present in the country's research institutions: research into language teaching and learning has a crucial role to play in contextualizing higher-order policies and anchoring them in the realities on the ground. Such dialogue would be very much in the interest of a well-planned development of language education in Austria. In fact, the establishment in 2008 of a national educational research institute (*BIFIE*) has marked something of a paradigmatic change in this direction, and the first large-scale quantitative studies concerning student performance on national language tests are now starting to appear. Complementing this new departure into quantitative educational research, one can observe a certain trend in university-based projects (e.g. dissertations) towards the use of qualitative methodologies such as interview and diary studies, as well as biographical and introspective data. This, however, we would interpret as a consequence of international research trends in language learning and teaching rather than a reaction to Austrian policy makers' recent discovery of, and emphasis on, quantitative educational research. An important research area that lies between these two poles is classroom-based research: we think this should be intensified because of its immediate links to actual classroom practice (i.e. language teaching and learning activities).

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Finally, a desideratum, in the interest of coherence and exchange of information within the research community, would be a national (online) journal covering research on language teaching and learning that would help fill the gaps between groups centred around individual languages and between different types of institutions.

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Given space limitations, titles are given in the original language(s) only. Readers interested in their English translations should contact one of the authors using the email addresses on the first page of this paper.

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