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„Which Books Should We Order? – EFL and Multilingual  
Picturebooks in Austrian Elementary Education“

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# 1. Introduction

In our globalized world, already the youngest learners are expected to speak and understand more than one language. In many families multiple L1s are spoken, which shows that the role of family language has changed. Many parents support early foreign language learning, as plurilingualism is a valued competence in our society and children are expected to be “linguistically and culturally aware and proficient” (Hadaway 268) at a young age. Education requires a certain context, which for young children living in Austria is the family on the one hand, and the kindergarten setting on the other hand. Kindergarten can be attended from two and a half years up to six years of age, only the last year is obligatory. Kindergarten teachers are expected to support and foster the young learners’ overall development, a part of which is linguistic development of first, second and foreign languages. Multilingual picturebooks are a valuable means to include a variety of languages in elementary education; moreover, positive attitude towards other languages and cultures can be facilitated. Picturebooks can provide windows to other people’s lives and support the development of empathy and tolerance by introducing children “to characters whose lives are different from their own” (Aronson 165). Picturebooks can also act as mirrors for readers with unique character traits, characteristics, another cultural background or L1. In mirror books “children can recognize characters like themselves” (Aronson 165). Ideally, the range of picturebooks children encounter in their daily lives include some acting as mirrors and some acting as windows. While the former support the development of self-esteem and significance, the latter foster empathy, curiosity and understanding (Aronson 165). The interpretation of mirror or window books depends on the reader, each book can serve both purposes, while it is a mirror book for one child it can provide a window to a distinct culture for another one. “Literary texts produce different readings with different readers.” (qtd. in Bland, *Leaner Empowerment* 59).

Austrian elementary education is organized and financed by the government and as Austria is part of the European Union, plurilingual and EFL competence are facilitated. English as a foreign language is the primary focus due to its status as a lingua franca in the EU and worldwide. EFL can be a connecting element of all languages including German, the national language, and any other language spoken by the children and parents in the group. In Lower Austrian kindergartens English is not a common L1

spoken by the young learners; hence, it is a foreign language for most of them. This is a chance to counter-balance any previous language knowledge of the heterogeneous groups and start from scratch. In my experience as an English kindergarten teacher, this fact often reversed the learners' roles in the group, as some were already used to acting as translators, which implied that they were slightly ahead of their peers. When EFL was introduced, the children who were already learning German as an L2 typically acquired English faster, presumably because they were more accustomed to the process.

These observations are based on my professional experience of teaching English in four different public kindergartens in Lower Austria. Altogether I taught twelve groups with roughly fifteen children each, including one inclusive group, over the course of four years. The exact number of children varied each year. While I accompanied some learners for only one year, I accompanied others over three years, which allowed me to observe their individual learning progress. Participation in the lessons was always voluntary; therefore, the group sizes varied. Typically, the lessons were attended by five to ten children, with some exceptions when the whole group was invited to join. Sometimes the kindergarten teachers expected all children to participate to do certain crafts or learn new songs or games. When too many children were motivated to join shared picturebook readings, the groups were divided to allow each child to see the book properly. Each kindergarten group was assigned to one lesson of sixty minutes per week. Depending on the kindergarten and the actual group size, I either joined them or asked the children to come to another room. I sometimes also separated the groups according to their age to focus on certain topics, vocabulary, games, songs, crafts or picturebooks. Considering the references to my teaching experience in this thesis, it needs to be acknowledged that no academic research was conducted.

Kindergarten teachers often approached me asking for multilingual and EFL picturebook recommendations. After some research I discovered a lack of information and guidelines for book selection. Although EFL and multilingualism are well researched, basic criteria for appropriate picturebooks for elementary education is not available (yet). Therefore, this thesis is written to support educators in their books selection. The following research question will be answered: "What makes

picturebooks appropriate for EFL and multilingual education in (Lower) Austrian elementary education?" Young learners should acquire linguistic knowledge from picturebook readings, among other teaching methods. In order to define criteria, a variety of factors need to be taken into consideration. (Lower) Austrian kindergartens are public institutions; therefore, the political situation of the EU and the nation of Austria are relevant. The "Bildungsrahmenplan" and the "Bildungsplan" (Charlotte Bühler Institut) are the curricula for (Lower) Austrian elementary education provided by the government. As in these two documents the basis for elementary education is defined in compact form, they are the basis for this thesis. In the first section, the two curricula are described and analyzed. Then, the role of multi- and plurilingualism in Europe is discussed with a focus on elementary education. Multilingual picturebooks are presented as language learning tools in kindergartens, followed by a more general examination of picturebooks as multimodal texts. As kindergarten groups are heterogenous, diversity in picturebooks is addressed and the representation of gender and race is discussed. In chapter 5, vocabulary acquisition from picturebooks is outlined and information for the choice of target vocabulary is presented. Subsequently, some ideas and examples considering the involvement of young learners in the daily routine are presented. The involvement of the learners' families is another relevant issue. Finally, selection criteria, including examples, for the choice of appropriate multilingual and EFL picturebooks is provided.

## **2. Curriculum for Elementary Education in Austria**

The Austrian government provides a curriculum for elementary educational facilities for children from zero to six years of age (Charlotte Bühler Institut). This document is the basis for kindergarten education, including second and foreign language education, throughout the country; only Lower Austria and Vienna provide more detailed curricula for their states. The focus is on the child as a competent individual who plays an active role in their development. The following principles are defined to support early childhood development: holism and learning with all senses, individualization, differentiation, empowerment, lifeworld orientation, inclusion, correctness considering content and concept, diversity, gender-sensitivity, participation, transparency and education partnership (5-7). These principles provide the basis for education in kindergarten; thus, they are reflected and elaborated on in this thesis. They overlap and interact; therefore, they aim at a holistic and interconnected educational approach, based on the interests and needs of individual children. The following six areas of education are described in further detail: emotions and social relationships, ethics and society, language and communication, movement and health, aesthetics and design, nature and technology (14-27).

Considering language, the importance of the children's L1 is highlighted, as the first language is of profound significance, including regional dialects or sign language. The "family language", as it is further referred to, deserves appreciation because language and identity are closely connected. Besides, L1 competence is the foundation for successful second language acquisition, consequently, constant advancement of the children's L1 command is of great importance. Moreover, a pluralistic society benefits from people engaging themselves with a variety of languages. The curriculum does not provide any information or suggestions considering second or foreign language learning, which is a major neglect. A variety of first languages is spoken in kindergarten groups, that implies that German is the second language for many children. Families frequently speak in another language; therefore, many young learners start going to kindergarten without being fluent in German. This provides a major challenge for educators and should be acknowledged by the government. Furthermore, teachers



require information and support considering the implementation of various L1s and other foreign languages.

Language education should ideally be composed of verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal aspects in the curriculum to support the learners in a variety of ways. Another significant term mentioned is “Literacy”, which is defined as including all experience, ability and skills which children encounter via books, narrative and literate culture before the actual process of learning how to read and write. Children should gain knowledge about how signs, symbols and writings carry meaning without personal presence of other people. This insight can only be gained through the engagement with appropriate children’s literature, which provides the basis for future literacy (19-21). It remains unclear what “appropriate children’s literature” exactly is, no criteria are provided for selection. Hence, teachers are expected to support literacy in various languages, without having parameters or guidelines provided in the curriculum.

The government published a supplementary document; however, the focus there is on five to six-year-old children. In Austria, the last year in kindergarten is obligatory, while the others are voluntary. Therefore, many children only start elementary education when they are five years old and attend it for one year before they start school. This is a rather short time to support (language) development and children need to acquire considerable knowledge in the aforementioned areas. It can be assumed that this is the reason for the supplementary document focusing on the last year in preschool elementary education. The document provides educational and developmental-psychological aspects of language learning for preschoolers. It is stated that children benefit from constant and active engagement with multiple languages, including regional dialects, minority and foreign languages. This entails open-mindedness and interest for other languages (27). Learners should recognize their own plurilingualism as a resource and use languages according to the situation. Linguistic diversity should be visible in the learning environment and children’s literature about various countries and cultures and in a variety of languages should be made available (29f). Teachers have to acknowledge their learners’ right to select their language (30), which can be a challenge as educators cannot be expected to understand all of their learners’ family

languages. They can establish plurilingualism as naturalness and normalcy though and include a variety of the children's first languages in the daily rituals (30).

Some examples for implementation are provided, like role-plays in different languages, picturebook cinema or excursions to public readings. A particularly creative idea is the project "Emergence of a Book", where children can produce their own books (31). Dictionaries or nonfiction books are suggested; however, picturebooks are possible as well. The whole kindergarten group could, for example, produce one picturebook together, including all the cultures and languages present in the group. Parents could be involved for explanations, translations, illustrations or pictures. The teacher might provide an overall topic as a guideline or a rather specific issue. The following picturebooks are inspiring examples: *Children Just Like Me: A New Celebration of Children Around the World* (DK), *Food Like Mine: Includes Amazing Recipes from Around the World* (DK), *Nasengruß und Wangenkuss – So macht man Dinge anderswo* (Anne Kostrzewa and Inka Vigh) or *Geburtstag, Karneval & Lichterfest – So Feiert man Feste Anderswo* (Anne Kostrzewa and Inka Vigh). In each of the examples one topic is depicted from different perspectives, like children's personality, food, habits or celebrations. Teachers, learners and their families could jointly produce simplified versions to provide each group with a customized self-made picturebook to read together.

Overall, plurilingualism and foreign language learning are highlighted in the accompanying material; however, the original document "Bildungsrahmenplan" hardly mentions multi- or plurilingualism and its implementation in Austrian elementary education. Teachers lack selection criteria for appropriate multilingual or EFL picturebooks and no example books are provided in either of the documents. Although some ideas for implementation of picturebooks are provided, it remains unclear what qualifies books as appropriate or useful for language learning.

## **2.1. Curriculum for Elementary Education in Lower Austria**

Lower Austria provides a more detailed version of the curriculum for their kindergarten teachers. Competences are outlined more explicitly, followed by pedagogic impulses, exemplary educational opportunities, set learning environment and guiding questions for reflection on the educational process. All these are formulated for the same six areas of education as in the government's publication, one of which is language and communication. The primary focus here is, again, L1 competency, however, progress and differentiation of linguistic competence in the first and second language are mentioned to support children in their development. Language competency refers to phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Furthermore, it is differentiated between productive and receptive skills in any language, which children should learn to apply according to various communication situations. Major significance is attached to phonological awareness, which is the ability to apprehend structural aspects of language. Overall, considerable experience for all senses, including movement and exercise, should be provided by every kindergarten to improve children's language skills (17-18). This approach appears promising as children's language development should be supported as a whole. All senses should be included in the learning process, which is considered highly beneficial for language acquisition, as described in more detail in chapter 5.

The curriculum offers an extensive collection of techniques to support verbal skills, of which the following can easily be implemented in L2 teaching through picturebooks:

- Reading out picturebooks, stories and fairy tales by means of, for example, hand puppets speaking in various languages
- Motivating children to a playful approach to languages, like rhymes or fingerplay
- Dealing with emotions via language, i.e. via picture books, mime and gesture.

(22)

In addition to that, children should grow up in a learning environment that further fosters their linguistic development. The following ideas are suggested for kindergartners:

- Pictograms, symbols, diverse languages and writing systems throughout elementary education

- Additional children's literature, lexica, illustrated books, nonfiction picture books and books about various countries and cultures should be provided
- Children's literature in languages spoken in the group or by neighboring countries, in English and other foreign languages
- Picturebooks, listening material and movies in different languages.

(23)

Kindergarten teachers are expected to show high levels of attention and sensitivity to each child's individual language skills. They have to be aware of all the languages spoken in their groups and, ideally, all of them should be cherished, encouraged and fostered. A variety of tools and resources has to be available for everyone in the group to engage with those languages, as well as cultures. Literature providing a variety of languages, topics and aspiration levels is mentioned explicitly (24). Hence, linguistic diversity is a major issue in Lower Austrian kindergartens. The state clearly expects its educators to appreciate their heterogeneous groups of children and create a positive attitude towards diversity of languages and cultures. German is the primary tongue spoken in public institutions all over Austria; however, besides that no other language appears to be prioritized.

Overall, the curriculum provided by the state of Lower Austria is more detailed than the one for all of Austria, additionally, a particular emphasis is laid on foreign / second language learning. No distinction is made between EFL and ESL learning, the terms "Fremdsprache", meaning foreign language, and "Zweitsprache", meaning second language, are used interchangeably. Therefore, it is assumed that both terms are inclusive. Plurilingualism is merely mentioned as an obstacle in communication, along with delayed speech and language development, emotional stress, or hearing impairment. The educator's sensitivity and know-how are highlighted in order to comprehend and support the child's individual linguistic development (19). This description of plurilingualism proves ignorance of relevant research, as the potential of plurilingual education is well-established among scholars.

However, a detailed leaflet considering plurilingualism in elementary education is provided online by the government. A shared initiative for conveying languages of

neighboring countries has been started by the following three institutions: the “Regionale Entwicklungsverband Industrieviertel-Projektmanagement”, “Westpannonische Regionale Entwicklungsagentur Gemeinnützige Nonprofit GmbH”, and the department for elementary education in the Lower Austrian state government. Together with the University of Vienna, more specifically the department of German studies, a manual for teaching Czech, Slovakian, Hungarian, German, English and 15 further so-called “Begegnungssprachen” in kindergartens was published. This hands-on guideline provides a didactic-methodical basis for both, facilitation of foreign language learning on the one hand, and facilitation of L1 if it is not German, on the other hand. (Boeckmann et al. 4)

Furthermore, the state of Lower Austria provides supplementary material to support five to six-year-old children, comparable with the supplementary document provided by the government of Austria (Charlotte Bühler Institut). Stundner, Kirchner and Reis also highlight language diversity and cultural differences as societal reality in Europe; therefore, children should achieve intercultural competence (18). Plurilingualism should be appreciated and be visible, readable and audible in elementary education. Parents are emphasized as a resource for plurilingualism in kindergarten; hence, they should be involved considering pronunciation or production/obtaining material and media, for example (19). A variety of ideas considering implementation of plurilingualism in kindergartens is provided; however, these are similar to the ones discussed in the previous chapter and are therefore not described in more detail again.

## **3. Multilingual Education**

### **3.1. Multilingualism**

The ability to communicate in more than one language has gained profound significance throughout the last decades. Bilingualism and even multilingualism have become crucial competences for many people in our globalized world. There are 23 officially recognized languages within the European Union alone; moreover, there are over 60 regional and minority languages, besides uncounted languages spoken by migrant communities. The EU is highly interested in preserving this linguistic diversity

for various reasons. Therefore, “A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism” was published in 2005, providing the EU’s policy in three basic areas:

- *underlining the major role that languages and multilingualism play in the European economy, and finding ways to develop this further*
- *encouraging all citizens to learn and speak more languages, in order to improve mutual understanding and communication*
- *ensuring that citizens have access to EU legislation, procedures and information in their own language*

(Special Eurobarometer 2)

This document is a supplement to the EU’s action plan “Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity”, which was published in 2003. This approach was adopted to embrace linguistic diversity, create language-friendly communities and facilitate language teaching and learning overall. The EU encourages and fosters multilingualism of its citizens and a long-term objective was set “that every citizen has practical skills in at least two languages in addition to his or her mother tongue” (Special Eurobarometer 2). Rindler Schjerve and Vetter (12ff) also address this issue and point out how the significance of multilingualism has increased on the EU’s political agenda and as a common European project to facilitate the ongoing unification process. Foreign language competence is supposed to increase awareness, appreciation and solidarity between peoples, while at the same time cultural wealth and linguistic diversity should be maintained.

Before discussing the situation in Europe further, the term “multilingualism” requires a definition. This is a complex issue, as there are multiple viewpoints originating in various theoretical and practical perspectives. One of the main issues for defining “multilingualism” is the proficiency in the respective language. What is the role of native-like language skills? If they are required, does this apply to all competences alike? If proficiency is measured according to the European Framework of Reference, the CEFR, what is the role of literacy? A child might be fluent but illiterate in Arabic, while learning German as a second and English as a foreign language. Even though he or she would then be able to read and write in English, their English productive skills might never be as advanced as their Arabic ones. An actor or a musician might perform

perfectly in a language without comprehending it, let alone be able to have a conversation. Hence, the definition of a multilingual person is highly complex. Franceschini (34) provides a definition, that is also the basis for this thesis:

*“Multilingualism is a product of the fundamental human ability to communicate in a number of languages. Operational distinctions may then be drawn between social, institutional, discursive and individual multilingualism.”*

The proficiency in the different languages is not clarified further, however, the definition does correspond with A1 level considering conversation of the CEFR: ‘

*Can make an introduction and use basic greeting and leave-taking expressions. Can ask how people are and react to news. Can understand everyday expressions aimed at the satisfaction of simple needs of a concrete type, delivered directly to him/her in clear, slow and repeated speech by a sympathetic speaker. (Council of Europe, CEFR 76)*

The speaker needs to be able to produce and comprehend a language; he or she has to be able to conduct a simple conversation on everyday issues. There is a much larger variety of descriptors which are more precise, of course. However, to illustrate the correlation between Franceschini’s definition, which is relevant for the following pages, and the CEFR, this short extract is sufficient. Franceschini’s definition of “multilingualism” concurs with the definition for “plurilingualism”, which is further described in the following chapter. In the majority of research relevant for this thesis the term “plurilingualism” is not used (yet). Furthermore, the German translations of “multilingualism” and “plurilingualism” are both “Mehrsprachigkeit”, which makes them indistinguishable in the curriculum. Therefore, the two terms are not strictly distinguished in this paper.

To sum it up, multi- and plurilingual people can use a variety of languages for different social, cultural and economic reasons. They might come from various bi- or multilingual backgrounds or be in contact with several monolingual communities. Competence and proficiency are likely to differ in their languages; furthermore, they might fluctuate over

time. Roles and functions may vary as well, and speakers may use them separately or codeswitch (Kemp 12). As mentioned before, people speaking two languages are generally referred to as “bilingual”, as opposed to “multilinguals” who speak three or more. Even though this distinction is not shared by Franceschini, who considers bilingualism a special form of multilingualism and therefore includes it when discussing the latter, it is the basic assumption for this thesis.

### **3.2. EU Policy**

Austria is a small European country, surrounded by larger nations with a variety of national languages, and its citizens are typically confronted with different languages from an early age. Many children are raised in a language that none of their peers can speak or understand and vice versa. As this is the case in the majority of EU countries, the European Union aims at mutual understanding and multilingualism. EU policy is defined in the aforementioned CEFR by the Council of Europe. This document was published in 2001 and already then, the concept of plurilingualism was mentioned as one approach to language teaching. In 2018 a Companion Volume with new descriptors was released, where plurilingualism is described in more detail. Plurilingualism, as opposed to multilingualism, where numerous languages can exist separately side by side on a societal level, is multilingualism on an individual level. A plurilingual person does not necessarily speak a number of languages fluently but is able to code-switch between them depending on the situation or interlocutor. Communicative competence is built where all skills in various languages interrelate and interact, like partners speaking different L1s. They might switch between languages to hold a conversation according to their productive versus receptive language skills; or a person might recognize words in an unknown language because they are similar in another, familiar language; or one might end up being a mediator between speakers of different languages by simplifying the languages and using paralinguistic features like mime, gesture and facial expression. Hence, native-speaker-like language skills are not necessarily the main aim for a plurilingual person. Instead, mutual understanding in many situations and with diverse interlocutors should be achieved by drawing upon all linguistic and cultural resources (Council of Europe, *CEFR* 4-5).



The Council of Europe emphasizes the integrative and intercultural approach towards plurilingualism, which does not only rely on linguistic knowledge but also on cultural experiences of the individual. As described before, the concept of plurilingualism is often portrayed as “multilingualism”; however, it is assumed that the plurilinguistic approach is the future, as it includes multilingualism. In the following chapters the two terms are not strictly distinguished for the reasons mentioned before. Vetter (232) describes plurilingualism as “a holistic, multi-faceted, dynamic and individual vision that is open to partial competence and circulations, mediations and passages between languages and cultures”. In 2018, these ideas were developed in greater detail and other concepts were added; the most relevant for this thesis being the last one, which describes the willingness and ability to “expand linguistic/plurilinguistic and cultural/pluricultural awareness through an attitude of openness and curiosity” (158). Readiness and capacity towards other languages and cultures are also central educational objectives in the curriculum for Austrian kindergartens (see chapter 2).

Hence, “the fundamental point is that plurilinguals have a single, inter-related, repertoire that they combine with their general competences and various strategies in order to accomplish tasks” (Council of Europe, *Companion* 28). Furthermore, this holistic concept has been shown to support other cognitive functions via an “enhanced executive control system in the brain”, like avoiding distractors and increasing concentration (Council of Europe, *Companion* 28). This last argument is particularly relevant for young language learners, as their attention span is still rather limited and focusing on a task for more than a few minutes is a challenge for many of them.

### **3.2.1. Language Reality**

A survey requested by the European Commission provides detailed information on “Europeans and their Languages” (Special Eurobarometer). Almost 27.000 interviews were conducted in person with adult citizens of various social and demographic groups in the then 27 member states of the European Union. The findings were already published in 2012; that was before the wave of immigration in 2015, which might have changed some of the results. However, as this is the last version published by the EC, the findings are still relevant for (elementary) education. They should be taken into

consideration for the development of curricula and specific lesson planning, since they show language reality in the EU.

The language with most native speakers is German (16%), just before English and Italian (13% each) and French (12%). English is by far the most widely spoken foreign language with 38%, followed by French (12%), German (11%), Spanish (7%) and Russian (5%). Furthermore, English is spoken as a foreign language in 19 out of 25 member states, excluding those where it is an official language, like the UK. Europeans use foreign languages in various situations, most people do so on holidays abroad (50%); over 30% watch films/TV, listen to the radio, use the internet or communicate with friends in a foreign language. Additionally, more than a quarter of Europeans need languages other than their mother tongue at work. Almost 90% of the EU citizens value knowing more languages as useful and two thirds assess English as first or second most valuable language. Almost all (98%) European citizens think that speaking another foreign language is beneficial for the future of their children.

The most significant obstacles for language learning of adults are a lack of motivation (34%), followed by a lack of time and money. Low self-esteem is an issue for every fifth person, they mention being discouraged by a lack of competence in languages in general. These barriers are highly relevant for this thesis, as basically all of them can be overcome when starting to learn as early as possible. In elementary education, young learners will not lack motivation when being engaged in entertaining and enjoyable activities, like reading multilingual picturebooks. Time and money are no issues either and typically young learners are not yet self-conscious about their language competence.

To sum up, Europeans' attitudes towards multilingualism are overall distinctly positive and reflect what the Council of Europe has stated in the CEFR. The goals considering plurilingualism appear to mirror people's realities. Therefore, a plurilinguistic approach should be facilitated in elementary education. Considering the selection of multilingual picturebooks, teachers need to be aware of the language reality in the learner's direct surrounding, like their families, but they also need to take the bigger picture into consideration. They have to consciously decide which languages they want to have represented in their books; this issue is further discussed in the following chapters. The

fact that English is considered the most useful language for future generations is relatable as it is spoken by a majority of people in Europe and all over the world. However, this should not lead to the conclusion that English is the only foreign language to be mastered even though its status as a lingua franca seems to confirm that view. Hence, EFL picturebooks are useful in each kindergarten, supplemented with a variety of multilingual picturebooks.

### **3.3. Multilingual Education in Kindergarten**

How can multilingualism be implemented in language teaching in general and in teaching kindergartners more specifically? According to Eva Vetter (228) the first step is to recognize that any single language taught and learned is always “part of a whole that comprises all linguistic capacities of language users”. Rather than isolating the new language to be learned, all language knowledge previously acquired by the learner needs to be taken into consideration. Therefore, the dynamics of languages are a distinguishing feature of multilingualism pedagogy. This means that before planning lessons the teacher has to meet their future students and familiarize him-/herself with their current language competences to be able to build on them. The instructor should ascertain which languages are spoken in the group and to which extent, which is of course a challenging task; however, with young learners it can be done easily by interviewing their parents.

Languages in our education system vary significantly in various ways and the social dimensions are highly relevant. As Franceschini already described in 2009, one reason for the then increasing interest in multilingualism was the growing sensitivity towards socio-cultural diversity and the according acceptance of heterogeneity in society, including classrooms (29). She further referred to the increased migratory movements all over Europe in the fifty years before. Hence, even before the large-scale immigration wave of 2015, when over one million asylum-seekers and refugees arrived in Europe and caused the so-called “refugee crisis”, European societies had been far from homogeneity. What had already changed before the “migrant crisis” was people’s attitude “towards the value contained in multilingualism at the individual and societal level” (Franceschini 30). Multilingualism had already, slowly but steadily, received a

positive image and increasing it further is one crucial part of teaching languages nowadays.

One relevant issue to be considered in this context is prestige. Different languages are visible in diverse situations and contexts, additionally, contrasting performances and abilities are expected from its speakers (Vetter 228). Franceschini (50) described the difference between language acquisition and language learning. On the one hand, language acquisition implies that language is acquired “in a natural context”, like in the family or via other personal contact. On the other hand, a language can be learned in a formal setting, like at school. This distinction alone often becomes a matter of prestige. While English is spoken and taught by teachers in class, regional or minority languages are often used with the family in a home setting or in the peer group. This linguistic background at home or in a peer group can overlap with the formal languages taught and/or spoken at school in various ways. Prestige is a huge issue, thus children with distinct mother tongues might be perceived differently by their colleagues and especially by their teachers. That is one of the reasons why already young learners often categorize one language as superior to another one. Categorizations of languages like native versus foreign language are generally questionable as boundaries are not as clear-cut. This needs to be recognized and compensated, particularly when teaching heterogeneous groups. Multilingualism pedagogy and multilingual education provide one approach in this direction when reacting to the linguistic diversity of learners. (230)

There is no one single and coherent approach in multilingualism pedagogy, instead there are various realizations depending on their primary focus. The integration of all languages children bring with them is a highly complex issue because, even though it is commonly agreed upon that all languages interact in the multilingual mind, choices need to be made on which ones should or can be included in the classroom for practical reasons (235). Vetter highlights two radical approaches, on the one side, there are methods that attempt to include as many languages as possible. Some approaches, on the other side, utilize one language previously acquired as a basis for teaching and learning another one, an example provided is English as a Lingua Franca or “bridge-language” for Romance intercomprehension (235). There are also other ways of

categorizing, like the relevance of similar typology that forms a language family. Furthermore, target competences could play a role as some approaches might solely aim at specific skills, like reception, production or interaction, rather than a wide range.

Vetter emphasizes the importance of teacher training on the management of multilingualism in their classrooms in the sense of building on existing language knowledge and facilitating long-term learning in the learners. She does not specify on a certain learner age; therefore, it is assumed that teacher training for all language teachers is addressed. The following guidelines are suggested:

- (1) debating multilingualism / plurilingualism and its impact;*
- (2) adopting learner-centered pedagogic approaches for multilingualism and*
- (3) facilitating positive linguistic and intercultural experiences. (241)*

Debating multilingualism and its impact plays a significant role for Austrian kindergarten teachers, as it has not yet been introduced into the curriculum at BafEp (Bildungsanstalt für Elementarpädagogik) where they are educated. It can be assumed that most educators for young children have not been trained specifically in that area. Nevertheless, they are expected to individualize and support each child according to its specific language skills as described in the curriculum (see chapter 2). This concords with Vetter's second argument of adopting learner-centered pedagogic approaches. The facilitation of positive linguistic and cultural experiences is emphasized in the curriculum as well. Even though the Austrian approach to language education in kindergarten is consistent with Vetter's guidelines, this is not reflected in the teacher's pedagogic education. Although multilingualism pedagogy is an issue in further education, it is a major neglect to not have it included in the original education in detail. Therefore, the implementation of multilingual concepts still provides a considerable challenge for many educators, particularly if they are monolingual themselves. As the majority of Lower Austrian kindergarten teachers are monolingual German speakers, advanced training considering multilingualism pedagogy is essential. This applies to multilingual teachers equally, as it cannot be assumed that their own multilingualism increases their competency in teaching it.

One concrete idea for the realization of Vetter's guidelines is presented by herself; she suggests that teachers should teach language groups rather than one single language, meaning that one teacher could i.e. teach Russian or French and integrate other Slavic or Romance languages (242). My personal experience in teaching English in kindergartens has shown that the implementation of this approach would be challenging due to various reasons. The first and major one being the fact that the teachers themselves are often not fluent and / or confident enough in a variety of languages. Therefore, a nationwide implementation of this method might pose a problem. However, an alternative strategy could be the mutual employment of multiple teachers in a single classroom. Clearly, team teaching could bring additional advantages, besides multilingualism, for the children as well as the teachers themselves. One obvious drawback here are the added costs for the government. However, young language learners could benefit from multilingual teachers enormously. A response to each group's needs would be possible; teaching goal and learning objective could be adapted and individualization, which is strongly emphasized in the Austrian curriculum, would be furthered.

The English language has a special status as a Lingua Franca and a media language worldwide. As described in chapter 3.2.1, it is spoken in almost all EU member states, and two thirds of European citizens assess it as one of the most valuable languages. Children encounter English at an early age through pop-culture, including music, books, online apps, (multiplayer) games, videos and social media. Therefore, it should be implemented in every Austrian kindergarten. Until the year 2016, the state of Lower Austria employed hundreds of English native speakers who visited over 1000 kindergartens each week. Municipalities used to get funding to pay for native speakers who then visited each public kindergarten group for one hour per week. They were free to play, sing, read or do handicraft work with the learners; the only requirement was speaking and teaching English. This was an extremely valuable experience for most children as their first contact with the foreign language was in a more or less natural context and relaxed atmosphere. They were free to attend the lessons; nobody could be forced to learn. There were small groups of motivated children who were eager to learn. In my experience, most of them were excited when they saw their "English lady" or "English teacher" in the door and often they had practiced a song or chant that had been taught the previous week at home and could not wait to show their skills. Although

the specific output of those lessons was not measured, children acquired fundamental vocabulary knowledge as well as basic language and communication skills. They developed a positive attitude towards English, and foreign languages in general. These observations are based on years of teaching, and feedback from kindergarten teachers.

Then money was cut short and the idea for children to acquire a foreign language playfully with native speakers was abandoned (Brickner). The state argued that kindergarten teachers had to possess B2 English skills, according to the CEFR, anyway and could therefore fulfill the task of teaching English themselves. A great number of, mainly young, educators had already attended further English training provided by the state and had started to incorporate English in their daily routines in addition to the native speaker's lessons (noe.orf.at). The new cost-effective strategy was that kindergarten teachers in Lower Austria then had to teach English language skills to their groups themselves. The government ignored the professional opinion of kindergarten teachers; furthermore, the role of language in a relationship was ignored. A kindergarten teacher builds up a relationship with their young learners via his/her L1, which might be a challenge in a foreign language. Child's language has specific phonological and semantic elements that are typically not taught in teacher education. English native speakers are familiar with English child's language as they experienced it themselves as children, and they can use it to build a relationship with the children. There was a lot of strong criticism from parents and teachers as the implementation of native speakers had proven to be a successful strategy. Not only was it a tremendous aid in the teacher's everyday educational work, it also offered children the rare chance for individualized, holistic and casual language learning.

In summary, kindergarten teachers require more education and training for the appropriate implementation of multilingualism. English and other first and foreign languages of their learners should be included in the daily routines to facilitate language learning. Native speakers of a variety of languages can be valuable resources to support teachers in their work. They can collaborate with each other and the teacher to arrange terms and content of their teaching. The involvement of parents speaking another L1 than German can be beneficial as they can judge the quality of

translations, for example, and provide authentic insight into other languages and cultures. Furthermore, a positive attitude towards other languages and ways of life can be fostered (see chapter 2) by cherishing the diversity of languages available in the group. This way, a variety of languages can be included in elementary education to support and foster the heterogenous group of children.

### **3.3.1. Multilingual Picturebooks**

One strategy of fulfilling many of those requirements and goals is the implementation of multilingual and multicultural picturebooks from an early age. Kersten and Ludwig described how these books can foster EFL and ESL learning experiences of children by referring to a bilingual picturebook with English and Spanish texts. They emphasized that languages had to be regarded “as a continuum of linguistic skills of meaning-making” (8) which needed to be fostered and consequently be the central aspect of teaching. Traditional education structures and practices should be broken up in order to allow new methods like cross-linguistic language learning. This is a way of valuing the different personal backgrounds of learners, including language, personal history and experience, culture and beliefs (9-11). Furthermore, it was argued that the strict idea of one target language is questionable as the teachers should use all the linguistic resources available in their groups (13). This is one way of cherishing the diversity of L1s equally and consequently alleviating the idea that one language might be more prestigious than another one. If children grow up knowing that their mother tongue is valued not solely at home but also in society, they might develop the desire to improve their L1 skills, which, as described before, then further enhances skills in other languages. Besides, they will feel more appreciated in the culture they grow up in, thus, integration might be facilitated. One important argument of Kersten and Ludwig is the fact that a multilingual classroom does not require a teacher who speaks all the languages that are present. Instead, the teacher’s attitude towards foreign languages is relevant, in the sense that they are not understood as a threat to the target language but rather an enrichment for everyone, learners and teachers alike. The teacher should implement multilingual picturebooks to make the learners aware of their resources and encourage them to activate and develop all of their language skills. (13-14)



Multicultural picturebooks are useful resources to support this process for various reasons. First and foremost, language skills can be transferred and, following that, languages can be compared and contrasted (Hadaway and Young 261). This helps readers develop metalinguistic ability and notice linguistic structures. The highly complex cognitive process of code-switching is facilitated in more than one way as readers require multimodal literacy while switching between two languages, possibly even two writing systems, and between visual and verbal codes. Picturebooks as multimodal texts are discussed in greater detail in chapter 4.2. Overall, multilingual picturebooks foster language learning and cognitive development in general (Hadaway and Young 261). Kümmerling-Meibauer ("Multilingualism and Children's Literature" viii) confirms this view by arguing that multilingual picturebooks support development of linguistic and visual skills alike. Furthermore, she emphasizes that "code-switching refers to the diverse culturally transmitted visual and linguistic codes inherent in these works" (viii). By that, she highlights the importance of visual illustrations as central components of meaning-making and the fact that the interpretation of pictures is culture culture-bound. This issue will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4. As mentioned before, some books also offer different writing systems, like Arabic or Chinese and English. The reader might wonder how this is relevant in a picturebook whose target audience are preschoolers. Besides, the majority of parents or teachers might not be able to read or understand the texts in the foreign language, so why should other writing systems be included? Kümmerling-Meibauer ("Code-Switching" 18f) argues that displaying foreign or minority languages cultivates appreciation, besides increasing meta-linguistic awareness. Moreover, the reader's interest might be sparked in further engaging with the respective language and culture. Commonalities between various languages and cultures might be discovered.

The realization of multilingualism in picturebooks varies; therefore, different approaches are presented by Hadaway and Young (262f). First, there are bilingual books providing complete texts in two languages; typically presented on the same doublespread. Languages included can be official or unofficial ones, like minority or indigenous languages. Some books only offer translations in the back, supposedly due to status or prestige. One major issue with bilingual books are translation concerns, which was also mentioned by Rowe and Fain (404) who suggested avoiding literally translated books, as the focus of the translation should be on meaning. This contradicts

Hadaway and Young's (262) view that closely matching translations are needed, as the target readers are not equally proficient and fluent in both languages and, therefore, compare and contrast both varieties. Nevertheless, possible limitations of this method are mentioned, one of them being that parallel text and literal translations do not always express identical meaning, for example metaphors. This sometimes results in avoidance of complex stylistic features to simplify translations, which can lead to stilted texts. Any translation always involves a series of choices to become a coherent and cohesive text in the target language. This highly complex process requires cultural awareness and sensitivity of the translator (Hélot 47).

Another issue is the layout and the organization of various languages, like the sequence of the varieties presented. If throughout the book one language precedes the other, it appears to be superior. Which text is the original one and which one is the translation? A particular challenge are languages with another reading direction than English, like Arabic or Chinese (Hélot 55). One possible solution is the avoidance of translations on the same page and the need to flip the book over to read in the opposite direction (Hadaway and Young 263). The realization of this approach is a challenge for picturebook illustrators and writers alike.

Another example for a multilingual picturebook specifically aimed at teaching vocabulary is provided by Hélot, referring to Mansot, Yifu and Bresner. They published a series of books of traditional Chinese stories told in French with Chinese ideograms integrated in the text. The authors expect their readers to decipher them, therefore, the Chinese script is placed right next to the French synonym. On the next page, the French word is omitted and replaced by the ideogram and the reader needs to remember its meaning. The key terms are translated that way throughout the books. This is an engaging and motivating way of introducing the Chinese script to English speaking children. The readers acquire some basic Chinese vocabulary while learning about Chinese culture. A literary experience is provided through contextualized language-awareness activities for the reader. (Hélot 56)

Hélot (57f) further describes how multiple languages can be introduced in a picturebook simultaneously without translations by introducing different characters

speaking one language each, as an example Leyla Torres's *Subway Sparrow* is named. Without analyzing this specific picturebook in more detail, its function should be described. There are various characters who live in New York City, each speaking a different language. No lingua franca is available, which leads to a plurilingual discussion. Without speaking any of the three languages provided, which are English, Spanish and Polish, the reader can comprehend the meaning and follow the storyline by means of images. Besides, the main characters are a diverse group of different gender, age and color with varying background, which makes reading it a multicultural experience. Hadaway and Young (263) describe this type of picturebook an "interlingual book", meaning that the storyline is not limited to one or even two languages relying on translation but rather a number of varieties can occur, and comprehension is supported by paralinguistic features. The goal is a plurilingual reading experience as described in the CEFR in chapter 3.2.

## **4. Picturebooks for the EFL Classroom**

### **4.1. Picturebook Typology**

Picturebooks are not to be confused with illustrated books. The focus of the latter is on the written text, which is embellished by illustrations that are inessential for the story (Graham 210). Fairytales, for example, are typical illustrated books as they have existed without any visuals for centuries, hence, readers should comprehend the tales without any pictures. One story might be released with different illustrations by various publishers; these newly published fairytales that include visual illustrations are illustrated books rather than picturebooks. Graham (211) also distinguishes "books of pictures", whose primary element are paintings and written text is reduced to a minimum. Alphabet and counting books, just as "[c]oncept books, designed to teach colours, shapes, materials, animals, and much else" (211) belong to this category. They are learning tools for children rather than entertaining narratives. Concept books provide colorful and fun ways for young children to learn new terms and letters; however, as there is no storyline, they are not considered picturebooks by Judith Graham. Nevertheless, counting and concept books can be valuable in early EFL and foreign language vocabulary acquisition as they focus on certain vocabulary topics. Young children get the chance to associate the English term with the according color

in the picture, for example. Other topic areas that can be taught via concept books are animals, vehicles, or family members if illustrations are straightforward. Utility depends on the specific book though and no general assertion can be made. Compared to that, alphabet books are entirely impractical in Austrian elementary education because the young learners are not familiar with the alphabet before they start attending school. Although, some might know the letters already, Austrian kindergartens are not authorized to educate them further in this area.

An alternative to EFL or multilingual picturebooks are those without any language: wordless ones. The stories rely on illustrations entirely and are not accompanied by any words. Although no text is provided, wordless picturebooks are available in a range of topics and levels of difficulty, Young learners can develop their own stories to the pictures (Hu and Commeyras 4f). A similar approach is adopted with “nearly-wordless picturebooks” (Bland, *Learner Empowerment* 40), where the narrative is presented via visuals only accompanied by few words or phrases. These phrases are typically repetitive throughout the book and therefore encourage reader-viewer participation (42). The following two books are examples that can be introduced in Austrian kindergarten settings: *Good Night, Gorilla* by Peggy Rathmann and *No, David!* by David Shannon. In both books the narrative is told in pictures, accompanied by short verbal phrases. Rathmann shows a story of a gorilla that steals the zookeeper’s keys and frees the other animals, while the verbal text merely consists of “Good night, Elephant.”, “Good night, Lion”., “Good night, Hyena.” etc. Shannon’s picturebook is similar, the reader encounters the story via visuals, supplemented by the mother’s verbal reprimands “No, David!”, “No, no no!”. From personal experience as an EFL kindergarten teacher, I argue for the implementation of nearly-wordless picturebooks. Most children could easily be motivated to join the chorus and repeat the same simple phrases time and again. Active participation was not something every child enjoyed; in fact, many learners were shy or insecure. They avoided speaking in a group where their peers and the teacher were listening to them and attention was the last thing they aspired. Nevertheless, the majority of them participated in these shared readings, if only after numerous repetitions or while reading the last pages. Nearly wordless picturebooks can help children overcome their personal inhibition threshold and, more generally, encourage participation while being read aloud. The repetitive action is

highly beneficial for language learning by encouraging progression and fostering memorization (Bland, *Learner Empowerment* 50).

Graham revealed some disadvantages young “reader-viewers” may encounter with wordless picturebooks, which equally applies to nearly wordless ones. First and foremost, they might not be able to “perceive significance and sequence”. As they are presumably not yet familiar with the reading direction, they do not understand the order of the pictures and, consequently, cannot follow the storyline (218). On the contrary, an advantage is definitely the fact that translations are not required and the picturebooks can be interpreted by speakers of various languages alike. Therefore, “the teacher’s English language input to the classroom discourse takes on an essential modelling status” (Bland, *Learner Empowerment* 41) and scaffolding discourse with pre-literate children becomes an essential element of storybook reading. However, since in Lower Austrian kindergarten settings it is now mostly German L1 speakers who read to the children rather than English native speakers, spontaneous translations and advanced scaffolding might be overwhelming for many kindergarten teachers who are not trained foreign language teachers. Therefore, wordless picturebooks, even though they could be useful for EFL and L2 teaching, might not be appropriate English teaching tools. Nevertheless, wordless picturebooks are unique and valuable educational material in multilingual settings as the teacher can teach multiple languages simultaneously or consecutively. Hu and Commeyras designed a study with 5-year-old Chaochao (pseudonym), a girl fluent in Chinese, who had moved to the US four weeks earlier. She was provided tutoring with wordless picturebooks as the primary material for ten weeks. Stories were told in Chinese and English, including additional exercises like labeling, sentence forming and invented spelling. Oral and written language skills, more specifically vocabulary knowledge, in English and Chinese were analyzed and the overall results showed a positive development in all areas. Chaochao was able to develop English and Chinese language skills simultaneously by utilizing wordless picturebooks. This shows that young learners can acquire foreign languages via wordless picturebook if they are implemented adequately, including scaffolding on the side of the teacher and additional pre-, while- and post-reading exercises. Children in Austrian kindergartens are preliterate, and no spelling system is taught yet; therefore, labelling, sentence forming and inventing spellings as shown by Hu and Commeyras are not relevant.

However, children can be involved in the reading process in a variety of ways, for example through novelty books (Graham 217). Those are picturebooks including moveable parts, which give the young readers the chance to be physically and actively involved. Numerous realizations of this approach have been published, like flaps, tabs, discs, envelopes, holes or three-dimensional panoramas. The children are invited to be a part of the story by engaging in these actions. Novelty books are typically highly entertaining for the learners and have proven to be valuable in EFL or multilingual classrooms as they are efficient in including various languages. Active engagement of young readers is encouraged, of which more in chapter 5.3.1.

A more recent variety of picturebooks are “wimmelbooks”, which are “textless picturebooks with doublespreads that present a panorama of characters and detailed ‘pluriscenic’ landscapes composed of various scenes” (Kümmerling-Meibauer, “New Millennium” 249). The term derives from the German “Wimmelbuch” and belongs to the genre of non-directive wordless picturebooks (Rémi 158). Outstanding characteristics are a “messy overabundance of visual material” and an “experience of dynamic wealth” (Rémi 158). If readers open a wimmelbook, they are confronted with detailed landscapes involving several minor scenes and an enormous number of characters engaging in these simultaneously occurring scenes and actions. The reader’s gaze is hardly directed, instead, children are challenged to explore and develop a coherent grasp of the manifold details. In combination with a lack of explicit reading instructions, the reader can approach them in many ways (Rémi 159). A variety of literacy skills can be acquired and trained with wimmelbooks, among others, readers need to “filter and structure a great amount of visual information”. This can be overwhelming for very young readers, therefore, Rémi argues for mature caregivers as scaffolders (161). Overall, wimmelbooks are ideally explored in one-on-one sessions of an adult and a child, which complicates their implementation in a kindergarten setting. If the circumstances allow individual readings, wimmelbooks can be a creative input to engage the child in descriptions or even a conversation in any foreign language. Educator and learner can explore the pages together and each child can focus according to their interest, which ensures individualized lessons and individualized language learning. The learner assumes control over target vocabulary

and focus of the lesson, while the teacher guides and scaffolds the learning process. The series *My Big Wimmelbook* published by The Experiment LLC offers a variety of topics, like *At The Construction Site*, *Fire Trucks* or *Dinosaurs* by Max Walther, *Cars and Things that Go* by Stefan Lohr or *A Day at the Zoo* by Carolin Görtler.

Besides printed picturebooks, an increasing variety of electronic book formats and literary apps is offered. On the one hand, e-books are either published as electronic forms of picturebooks following the traditional print version, or they include embedded features like audio and video (Kümmerling-Meibauer, "New Millennium" 260). On the other hand, picturebook apps can be "fully animated narrative[s] that only with some reservations can be called a book" (Al-Yaqout and Nikolajeva 1). This distinction was made by Kümmerling-Meibauer ("New Millennium" 260). Al-Yaqout and Nikolajeva applied different criteria, they referred to printed picturebooks as books and assigned all varieties of digital picturebooks to the category of apps. Although they mentioned that not all electronic book formats might strictly speaking be apps (2), this categorization is still challenging. This disparity of categorization reflects the general disagreement among scholars considering the relevant technical terms (1). The article discussing that issue was published in 2015, which might appear recent. However, considering the development of application software, four years are rather long. Nevertheless, no clear distinction between the terms "digital picturebook", "electronic picturebook", "e-book" and "picturebook app" have been agreed on.

For the scope of this thesis, the distinction between e-books versus enhanced e-books or apps is recognized as described before, because reader response and learning process vary. While reading a basic e-book without any interactive features, the only difference compared to a printed version of the book is that the reader requires an electronic device to access it and instead of turning the pages, he or she swipes right. While reading an enhanced e-book or in an app, however, the reader can be engaged and entertained in a variety of ways. New technologies provide the reader with remediated versions of the picturebook and add "living audio-visual effects, such as virtual object manipulation, verbal commands, and physical movements of users" (Søyland and Gulliksen 2). Children gain agency as they can consciously decide what they prefer to happen by touching the respective icons. Al-Yaqout and Nikolajeva (6)

argued that the reader becomes a co-creator rather than just a reader of the story by the increased interaction with the picturebook in an app. Søyland and Gulliksen challenged this view by arguing that touch interaction indeed facilitates sense-making, but this requires considerable experience. Furthermore, picturebook apps engage the reader in cooperation, which is not equal to co-creation (10). The fact that apps affect the reading process is agreed on, though. Picturebook apps are also a way for children to achieve media competency, which is described in the curriculum for Lower Austria (20). Therefore, picturebook apps can be valuable supplementary tools to support children in their development to become competent adults.

As described in the curriculum, children need pedagogic support to develop media competency and learn to deliberately use a variety of digital information and communication technology (20). A major challenge educators face in this context is the simple lack of this technology. The vast majority of kindergartens is, in my experience, not yet equipped with tablets or smartphones that learners can use independently. Some kindergartens provide one PC for all children, which is for obvious reasons not adequate. Therefore, digital media like e-books or tablets are not highly relevant for EFL teachers in elementary education at the moment. Besides, this complex topic is not yet researched in-depth and further study would go beyond the scope of this thesis. Concluding, apps can enhance language learning by actively involving the reader on the one hand. On the other hand, young EFL learners might need an adult to scaffold and guide them to prevent mental overload and ensure language learning. Enhanced e-books and picturebook apps have the potential to support the learning success if chosen carefully. Overall, these tools can be valuable in EFL lessons with young learners if implemented in addition to printed picturebooks and not as substitutes.

## **4.2. Picturebooks as Multimodal Texts**

As mentioned before, picturebooks are in clear contrast to other genres of literature in the sense that there are “two parallel types of communication, the visual and the verbal” (Nikolajeva and Scott, *How Pbs Work* 1). Judith Graham provided a similar description by referring to picturebooks as “a unique art form combining narrative (whether or not words are used) and image. [...] [T]he best picturebooks are usually complete designs, incorporating covers, end papers, layout, typography, format, and size. They also pay



attention to the potential for dramatic effect in each turn of the page” (209). She was obviously referring to printed versions rather than e-books or apps. An adequate picturebooks is not only defined by the narrative but also includes design, layout and format because they are the first books young children encounter, which means they influence them on various levels (Graham 209). All three authors claimed the dual importance of text and design, of narrative and visual representation. They do not prioritize one over the other and the interpretation of both modes plays a crucial role for analysis.

Halliday (83) described how each text comprises three major functions simultaneously. First, “ideational function or metafunction” refers to content, including characters, plot and setting. Second, “interpersonal metafunction” develops a relationship between writer and reader in terms of communicative interaction, including, for example, assertion, questioning or hedging the content. Third, “textual metafunction” is the coherent organization of the text. Visual representations in a picturebook can be regarded from all three metafunctional perspectives. Astorga (214) emphasized ideational function for second language learning, more specifically the variety of characters, processes and circumstances. Painter’s analysis (421f), on the other hand, was multimodal, based on the “metafunctional principle”, hence, text and images in picturebooks have ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning. Furthermore, each metafunction embodies further “meaning potential”. In other words, the specific realization of meaning is represented through various more precise choices, known as “systems”, for example “power, social distance, ambience, framing, and so on” (423). This was done for both, verbal and visual modes, however, those areas of meaning are not identical but rather comparable. Painter provided a detailed table for ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunction, some key areas of meaning were presented for both modes, visual and verbal (423f). As mentioned before, those meanings are comparable rather than identical. The action of talking, for example, being visually realized via speech bubbles or gestures, whereas the verbal realization are “clause structures with verbs of speaking” (424).

<i>ideational metafunction</i>		
<i>meaning potential</i>	<i>visual realization</i>	<i>verbal realization</i>
<b>Action</b>		
action	depicted action with vectors	clause structures with action verbs
perception	gaze vectors between characters	clause structures with verbs of perception
cognition	thought bubbles, face/hand gestures	clause structures with verbs of thinking
talking	speech bubbles, face/hand gestures	clause structures with verbs of speaking
inter-event relations	juxtaposition of images (+/- change of setting or character)	conjunctive links; reported and direct speech
<b>Character</b>		
character attribution	depiction of character	identification, classification and description of characters through relational clauses, noun groups, etc.
<b>Setting</b>		
circumstantiation	depiction of place, time, manner	specification of place, time, extent, cause, condition, manner, etc., using prepositional phrases, adverbs, etc.

Table 1: Complementary ideational meaning systems across image and language (Painter 424)

<i>interpersonal metafunction</i>		
<i>meaning potential</i>	<i>visual realization</i>	<i>Verbal realization</i>
<b>Affiliation</b>		
focalization	character gaze and alignment (or not) with reader's gaze	focalization via sourcing of perceptions and thoughts
power	vertical angle of viewing	reciprocity vs. inequality of linguistic choices between characters
social distance	shot size	nature of naming choices, endearments, etc. by narrator
proximity	relative proximity/touch of depicted characters	nature of naming choices, endearments, etc. between characters
involvement	horizontal viewing angle of reader	solidarity via specialized vocabulary, slang, range of topic choice by narrator
orientation	horizontal angle between characters	solidarity via specialized vocab, slang, range of topic choice between characters
<b>Feeling</b>		
ambience	color choices of relative, warmth, vibrancy, etc.	atmosphere created through tone and elaboration of circumstantiation
affect	emotion on depicted faces, + body stance	attitude via evaluative language
force	'exaggerated' size or angle, repetitions, proportion of frame filled, etc.	intensification, repetition, etc.

Table 2: Complementary interpersonal meaning systems across image and language (Painter 424)

Table 40.3 Complementary textual meaning systems across image and language

<i>textual metafunction</i>		
<i>meaning potential</i>	<i>visual realization</i>	<i>verbal realization</i>
framing	binding of visual elements into units; separation of units via frames, margins, page edges	chunking of verbiage via tone groups per clause
intermodal integration	image and verbiage placement within layout	
focus	compositional arrangement	information flow via tonic prominence, 'word order,' etc.
genre stages and phases	visual dis/continuity	staging created via internal conjunction, text reference, thematic progression, etc.

Table 3: Complementary textual meaning systems across image and language (Painter 425)

Overall, the tables show that the two modes, verbal and visual text, can interact in various ways, this is further discussed in Nikolajeva and Scott (*How Pbs Work* 14). If the author's and illustrator's intention is telling the exact same story, the outcome will be a symmetrical work, which appears to be the majority of the picturebooks on the market. However, complementary ones, where "words and images fill each other's gaps wholly" (17) are published as well. In that case text and visual interact perfectly, without leaving any room for the reader's imagination, which can lead to passivity on their side. Symmetrical books, on the other hand, leave the same gaps in writing and illustration, which obviates the need for both. They are often a result of lacking collaboration between writer and illustrator. Nikolajeva and Scott (*How Pbs Work* 16) emphasized that this is a frequent organizational issue in the United States. The writer often finishes the text, which their literary agent then sends to a publisher who only then picks a suitable illustrator. Hence, the author is not involved in the illustration of his/her texts, which can mislead him/her to including as many details as possible to ensure a certain interpretation. This results in illustrated books rather than picturebooks. Therefore, close collaboration between author and illustrator are a key requirement for the creation of a picturebook.

Another possible realization is the idea of two different stories being told by words versus pictures (18). Schwarcz described more varieties of "verbal-visual narration", depending on how words and pictures interact: "congruency, elaboration, specification, amplification, extension, complementation, alternation, deviation, [and] counterpart" (qtd. in Nikolajeva and Scott, *How Pbs Work* 6f). However, for the scope of this thesis

Nikolajeva and Scott's structuring as described above is adopted as it appears most useful for the categorization of EFL and multilingual picturebooks for elementary education. To sum up, relevant word-picture relationships are symmetrical, complementary, expanding/enhancing (both modes depend on each other) and counterpointing ("two mutually dependent narratives") (Nikolajeva and Scott, *How Pbs Work* 12). Kindergarten teachers should be aware of these relationships between verbal and visual, as they are highly relevant particularly in foreign language picturebooks. Young learners might understand the one but not the other; the educator needs to be attentive to that and choose books accordingly; depending on the learning aim and specific target audience. The requirements for book selection obviously vary between five-year-old children with basic previous English language knowledge and two-and-a-half-year-olds with no previous knowledge.

In general, Nikolajeva and Scott (*How Pbs Work*) refer to picturebooks as an art form that communicates via iconic and conventional signs. Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of semiotics is described. The signifier and the signified are directly connected in iconic signs. Alternatively, there is no direct relationship between conventional signs and the object they signify. Understanding conventional signs presupposes that its reader shares the same language, verbal and non-verbal (1). Pictures are iconic signs in picturebooks, whereas words are complex conventional signs. To create meaning, both modes require interpretation on the side of the reader. Adult readers tend to ignore the whole, they focus on the text and degrade the images as decoration (Nikolajeva and Scott, *How Pbs Work* 1-2). The relationship between signifier and signified is not always as straightforward as it appears to adult readers of the according culture. Children might face challenges with the interpretations of signs and require scaffolding and explanations of the teacher (see chapter 4.2.1).

Illustrations can convey additional information to words – but what exactly? One major element is atmosphere or mood (Nodelman, "How Pbs Work" 59). Pictures prompt feelings in their viewers without many descriptive words; often it is not a matter of what is depicted but how (59). Pictures are interpretations of the written words and can create their own narrative (60). The reader encounters what the characters are doing how. Posture, expression, mime and gestures convey meaning and make the reader

feel a certain way. Nikolajeva ("Dynamics" 110) highlights how picturebooks "may potentially offer a powerful tool for understanding one's own and other people's emotions". This is particularly the case for pre-literate children as their ability to connect the emotions they feel with their verbal signifier is still limited. The development of their theory of mind and empathy skills is not advanced yet, therefore, they cannot fully comprehend how other people think and feel. Picturebooks have enormous potential to develop these skills by presenting character's emotions and engaging the reader through text and images (112).

Nodelman ("How Pbs Work") argued similarly by describing his college students' opinion on that issue. According to them, the requirements for pictures in children's books were simplicity, clarity and diversity of color. Furthermore, they had to be concrete and large. The students apparently thought that the pictures provide straightforward information to children that was easier to understand than words. Nodelman himself disagreed with that view. He pointed out that children's drawings are rarely simple, instead they might be abstract and not colorful. Infants can comprehend words before they are able to interpret images. Picturebooks do not only contain pictures "to convey factual information" ("How Pbs Work" 57). Just as Nikolajeva and Scott, Nodelman argued that interpreting a visual required knowledge of conventions, like the fact that the size of a person in the book is not the actual size of that person and that he or she is actually in 3D and not flat; or that even though the person's hand in the photograph will be raised forever, he or she has most likely lowered it in the real world. Besides that, picturebooks follow other conventions which young children might not be familiar with yet. They might, for example, not know that the direction of reading in the Western world is from left to right and not vice versa, as mentioned before. However, Nodelman also indicated that some things can simply not be conveyed via images and therefore call for words. Sometimes pictures can even hinder communication, like when children get distracted by them and thus pay less attention to the text. This issue will be discussed further in the following chapters. (Nodelman, "How Pbs Work" 58)

#### 4.2.1. Cultural Knowledge

Kümmerling-Meibauer (“Code-Switching” 13) concurs with Nodelman considering the role of cultural knowledge for the interpretation of visuals. Based on some examples, like Cubist paintings or Japanese manga, she demonstrates how images can be challenging and convey diverse meanings depending on the viewer. For this thesis another example is provided, one that I encountered during one of my travels through Lao PDR, a developing nation in Southeast Asia characterized by poverty and widespread illiteracy. “Big Brother Mouse” is a small company whose founders have set themselves to change that by providing children in remote villages with colorful picturebooks to support literacy. Children are encouraged and motivated to improve their reading and writing skills. Their aim is the transformation of their beloved home country from one where people do not read to one where people love their books. Numerous challenges have complicated their proposition, first, that there used to be no culture of reading in the country at all. This was presumably due to the second obstacle, the fact that basically no books were available in Laotian and third, even if books had been published in the national language, that alone would not have solved the problems for two reasons. The first being that Lao is a mountainous country with poor infrastructure. A considerable part of the population does not have access to public schools, electricity or, let alone, shops. The second obstacle is poverty, which does not allow families to spend money on picturebooks when there is not even enough to buy rice for the next meal sometimes. Hence, the founders of Big Brother Mouse faced a huge challenge. To cut a long story short, they found authors and illustrators locally and investors abroad. Then they started to organize book-parties to get the books to the children. They pack their books into huge backpacks and take a boat or walk for hours to reach even the remotest village, where they distribute the picturebooks and show the teachers, parents and children how to read them. Many of them are translated to English as well, which often is the sole source of foreign language material in the children’s villages. (Big Brother Mouse, *Geschichte*)

What is specifically interesting for this thesis are the topics and themes of the books because stories and visuals are culture-specific and therefore not easily interpretable by Western readers. One example is *Sandar: The Robot Boy*, a bilingual Lao-English picturebook based on a true story, published by Big Brother Mouse. The main

character is a little boy who loses one of his legs in an accident, unfortunately not an uncommon thing to happen in Laos. However, he then encounters several other people who have also lost limbs, many of them by so-called “bombies”. An illustration shows how those accidents, caused by little explosive bombs left from the war decades ago, occur. Consequently, Sandar has to travel to the capital, Vientiane, together with his sister because she is the only member of the family who speaks Laotian (in addition to their minority language). The two children travel for 26 hours to get to the hospital and then they have to stay in the capital for 18 weeks to recover. Readers from Western countries like Austria supposedly face multiple challenges while reading this book and interpreting the drawings. While the English translation is straightforward and clear, the topic and illustrations are certainly not easy to understand for everyone. Cultural knowledge is needed to fully comprehend the picturebook, as argued by Kümmerling-Meibauer (“Code-Switching” 13) and Nodelman (“How Pbs Work” 58). Picturebooks are “a significant means by which we integrate young children into the ideology of our culture” (Nodelman, “Decoding Images” 131). As preliterate young children have not yet gained enough experience about the world around them to understand everything, picturebooks are a resource to support the development of ideologies. Hence, a publisher like Big Brother Mouse plays such a crucial role in a country like Laos as it is a way of educating young children about heritage, traditions, customs and attitudes besides raising interest in further studies. Undoubtedly, this is also true for our Western culture. The reason for this example is that sometimes we are “caught” in our own culture and blind to our own ideology, including customs, viewpoints and languages. This is particularly important for children from immigrant or minority backgrounds to whom those traditions are not natural. The contradistinction of mirror and window books needs to be mentioned here again.

#### **4.2.2. Picturebook Covers as Examples**

Sunderland and McGlashan (473) examined this multimodal relationship of text and illustration on book covers, focusing on homosexual parents. They referred to Jewitt’s three approaches to multimodality: “social semiotic, multimodal discourse analysis and multimodal interaction analysis” (479). Additionally, Halliday’s theory ascribing ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions to written as well as visual content is described. Further, Saussure and Peirce’s theory on semiology, distinguishing

signifier and signified as described before, are the basis for their analysis. The writers and illustrators, the “sign-makers”, are supposedly interested in creating positive signifiers for their book covers because they are key “marketing units”. As the primary elements portrayed on websites and catalogues, book covers need to possess “shelf appeal” and attract potential buyers (479). Overall, they claim that text and image enrich and support each other, which ties in with Nikolajeva and Scott’s view. Meaning is created through the combination of the two modes and mutual enhancement is a key element for a successful picturebook. Relevant modes for the interpretation of the book cover were: “action (e.g. gesture, posture), voice (e.g. talk, singing, whispering), other forms of sound (e.g. music, noise from machines), gaze and facial expression (and other non-verbal communication) and texture, as well as image (e.g. color, shape) and writing” (Sunderland and McGlashan 475). Additionally, “the position of elements in a framed space, size, color, shape, icons of various kinds – lines, circles – as well as resources such as spatial relation” (qtd. in Sunderland and McGlashan 474) played a crucial role. Moreover, the consideration of focus and background detail were relevant. The combination of several modes presented simultaneously provides a message, so multimodal analysis is more than the sum of its parts. The reader creates meaning through interaction and interference of text and images (475) and, in the special case of preliterate children, there is the additional challenge of combining the two competences Listening and Reading. Stories are typically read to young learners; hence, they are asked to listen to the narrative while interpreting the illustrations.

Sunderland and McGlashan (475) further highlighted the significance of the visual representation as additional information or clarifying details might be offered. One particularly important advantage contrary to language is the visualization of features like gender, race and class. The depiction of social context can be more straightforward than its description. Homosexuality, among others, is still a controversial political subject matter in many countries, which can make its explicit representation counterproductive. Therefore, “what cannot be specifically written may be suggested visually” and vice versa (475f). The representation of gay identity in clear dissociation of heterosexual identity can be a challenge for illustrators, as physical contact or “visualized proximity” between partners, a key element of illustrating an intimate relationship, are hardly shown in picturebooks. Sunderland and McGlashan (476) identified three strategies considering the depiction of parents’ homosexuality in a



positive way: “different”, “backgrounding” and “upfront”. The least utilized one was “upfront”, which involved an explicit explanation of the parents’ sexual identity. The most frequent one was “backgrounding”, which showed the couple in (stereotypical) everyday activities without any further reference to their sexuality.

All in all, the analysis of book covers indicates that text-image interaction is more than one mode enhancing the other but rather “multimodal mutual enhancement of the small title-texts and associated images” was identified (491). Although the text on the covers was concise, it enhanced the interpretation of the illustration, just like the depiction of relevant detail and symbolic signifiers supported the interpretation of the text. Clearly, reading those signs is culture-dependent, as detailed before. Kindergarten teachers should be aware of these facts and interpretations when choosing picturebooks to ensure appropriateness. The representation of identity should be as authentic as possible; to evaluate that, the multimodal relationship of verbal and visual text is essential. Ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions need to be considered, as well as modes that are presented. This does of course not only apply to the cover of the picturebook but to the whole book; however, the cover can give a first impression of the book’s content.

### **4.3. Diversity in Picturebooks**

Culture as a relevant part of elementary education has been mentioned repeatedly in the previous chapters. First and foremost, as described in chapter 2, the curriculum clearly states that positive attitude towards heterogeneity and diversity of cultures should be fostered. The relevance of books showing a variety of countries and cultures is mentioned explicitly and should not be underrated. This view is shared by the European Union and the majority of its citizens, as described in chapter 3. The role of cultural knowledge for the interpretation of visuals in picturebooks has been described in chapter 4, including examples. Nevertheless, the picturebooks I personally encountered in Austrian kindergartens hardly ever depicted any variety culture-wise. Even though all kindergartens provided books written in English, just one out of four kindergartens offered books with diversity in culture when I started in 2013. This has changed since refugee families started to settle in our area, which shows awareness on the side of the educators. Still, this raises the question of target readers for culturally

diverse picturebooks as apparently these books were bought to support the immigrant children and their families rather than to provide a broadened outlook for Austrian children.

Bland (*Diversity* 42) addressed this issue by criticizing the fact that English teaching in school settings merely includes English language education and excludes other aspects. Although English as a lingua franca is detached from one single culture, “economic and social change, cultural renewal, people’s dreams and desires” (qtd. in Bland) should be part of teaching languages. Appropriate teaching materials include representation of language and the world with its people. “An ideology close to that of the reader appears invisible, and yet can be highly manipulative” (42). Readers are often unaware of their own culture being depicted in books, which is clearly even more relevant for young children. They are influenced and manipulated into thinking that their own culture and ideology are the norm rather than one variety. Assumingly, this was the case in the aforementioned kindergartens. The educators only realized the lacking diversity in their chosen picturebooks when more children with various cultural backgrounds started to be part of their groups. Bland (43) also specifically emphasized the absence or misrepresentation of certain ethnicities, cultures and ideologies and the possible consequences for children. Teachers need to be sensitized towards this marginalization in order to avoid it in their own kindergarten groups. Authentic representations of diversity in picturebooks should encourage children to comparisons between their own world and the one depicted; hereby, intercultural learning can be fostered (Bland, *Learner Empowerment* 59).

Monobe (42) highlighted several general pedagogical benefits of reading multicultural children’s literature in elementary education. First, culturally responsive pedagogy is facilitated by responding “to the needs, interests, and experiences of students from culturally diverse backgrounds”. Second, discussions about other cultures can be stimulated, even with young children, an example is provided below. Third, the development of a positive and healthy self-image is fostered. Further, children develop empathy, critical thinking and sensitivity towards stereotypes, as an example, a first grader who was provided a picturebook about an African American baseball player was described. This book raised his interest in black people, and he started to wonder

where they lived. It was not until then that his mother realized how limited his interactions with black people had been before. Hence, the shared reading of this multicultural picturebook led to a dialog about race and racism which would not have existed otherwise (44).

Bland (*Diversity* 45) provides guidelines for an appropriate choice of intercultural picturebooks reflecting diversity:

- Language and content need to be accessible and age appropriate.
- Pictures should add meaning to the story.
- Empathy should be encouraged through words and illustrations.
- The story should be compelling, i.e. inspiring, funny, gripping or surprising.
- Readers should be able to relate to the narrative and be motivated to revisit it.
- The representation of people, cultures and the world around them has to be accurate and considerate.
- The story should encourage critical attitude and open discussions.

These guidelines are useful for the choice of picturebooks in Austrian elementary education in general, including EFL, multilingual and multicultural education. Other criteria need to be considered as well, see chapter 6. Not every book has to meet all of Bland's requirements, in general she argued that the chosen books should reflect cultural diversity authentically. However, authenticity is a vague term that requires further clarification. Flanagan (14f) also critically discussed authenticity without defining it further. She argued that the majority of Australian picturebooks were not authentic as they mainly focused on themes like nature and landscapes, which does not reflect contemporary Australian urban life. Furthermore, Aborigines were almost exclusively portrayed as "Australian bushman", an argument also advanced by Bland (*Diversity* 47), who criticized the portrayal of Australian Aboriginal peoples and indigenous peoples of the Americas in EFL textbooks. Their representation was neither authentic nor contemporary as they were regularly depicted wearing traditional clothing and showing stereotypical physical features. Yoo-Lee et al. evaluated cultural authenticity in multicultural picturebooks, focusing on African American, Asian American and Hispanic American varieties. Cultural authenticity was defined as comprising "not only the absence of stereotypes but also the presence of values

consistent with a particular culture and the accuracy of cultural details in text and illustrations” (326). This definition is straightforward and vague at the same time, as it is not clear what “accuracy of cultural details in text and illustrations” exactly means. Nevertheless, it was persuasively argued that the absence of stereotypes is not enough, instead cultural values need to be presented. Cultural authenticity was defined further and in greater detail for each ethnic group individually. African American picturebooks need more than “vivid language and worthy terms”, rather “well-developed characters in realistic situations, accurate representation of African American dialect, authentic illustrations of settings and characters (including African Americans’ skin color), and accurate information” were expected (326). Although these details were not described for Asian American and Hispanic American books, it can be assumed that accurate representation of characters, language varieties, physical features and setting were expected in all picturebooks. Considering Asian American picturebooks, a lack of authenticity was identified without defining that further. The depiction of cultural experience and history was not exhaustive, instead the same themes were explored repeatedly. Moreover, the vast majority of Asian characters were Chinese, Japanese, Korean or Indian, which excluded an enormous variety of Asian ethnicities (327f). A similar critique was expressed with Hispanic American picturebooks, where authenticity did also vary among its subgroups. Mexican American characters were portrayed rather differently than Puerto Ricans, for example. The usage of the Spanish language was pointed out, as words and phrases were often randomly included for kinship terms, for example (328). Yoo-Lee et al. argued that there is a lack of consensus considering an overall definition of cultural authenticity and they agreed with previous studies that “only an insider to the culture portrayed in the book can sense if it is authentic” (342). Therefore, they included several insider perspectives for each of their categories. Their analysis revealed a general consensus that the majority of the examined books were overall culturally authentic. Yet, stereotypical elements were still encountered in some text and illustrations.

Children’s librarians and educators who are compiling diverse picturebook collections are advised to “remember that no single book can reflect the variety of life experiences of even one cultural group” (Yoo-Lee et al. 342). Additionally, cultures are subject to constant change, which means that cultural authenticity is not stable either (342). Consequently, they referred them to the coding scheme developed for content

analysis, which overall concurs with Bland's (*Diversity*) guidelines. The scope of their coding scheme included book title, description of major and minor character(s), (including demographics like gender and age and social roles/relationships), stereotypical features and (in)authentic elements (330). Summing up, in both publications, Bland (*Diversity*) and Yoo-Lee et al., authenticity considering the representation and description of characters and setting were of major importance for the selection of appropriate picturebooks. Consequently, this is what educators and parents should focus on in their selection. In order to ensure authenticity and appropriate depiction of all characters, insiders of the respective cultures can be consulted and involved in the selection. These insiders have to be interculturally competent; they can be colleagues or parents, not the children themselves, however, as they might not yet be aware of underlying discriminatory features.

Inclusive education needs to provide learning opportunities for all children alike; exclusion is "a consequence of negative attitudes and a lack of response to diversity in race, economic status, social class, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation and ability" (UNESCO 5). According to UNESCO, the most pervasive reasons for exclusion from primary school education were poverty and marginalization (7). Although no data was provided for pre-school education it can be assumed that this data applies there as well. If children do not have the chance to attend primary school for whatever reason, they are extremely unlikely to have had access to a kindergarten. Some children specifically lack mirror books as they are marginalized within or even entirely excluded from education. The following illustration names underrepresented groups of people in education:



Fig. 1: Groups excluded from/or marginalized within education (UNESCO 7)

This data is included here to show the diversity of underrepresented groups. UNESCO (8) described the promotion of inclusion as “stimulating discussion, encouraging positive attitudes and improving educational and social frameworks”. Picturebooks are a valuable source for the initiation of discussions (see chapter 6). Furthermore, they can support the development of positive attitudes towards the groups of people depicted in Figure 1. Teachers should consider that and include a greater variety of picturebooks in their own teaching to provide mirror and window books for all the learners in their groups.

#### **4.3.1. Gender**

Gender stereotyping is a multifaceted issue in picturebooks to be uncovered via multimodal analysis. Karen Coats (119) suggested the concept of schemas and scripts to comprehend how prevailing social ideologies are conveyed via texts and images and why changing children’s awareness of gender poses such a serious challenge. A cognitive schema is “an associative cluster of ideas and knowledge about objects or situations”, acquired and developed through recurring experience, which is then the basis for the categorization and understanding of new, related information. A script describes the expectations considering sequences of action based on the evoked schema (qtd in Coats 119). “Once upon a time”, for example, evokes a fairy tale schema in most Western readers, including a certain setting and characters, like a princess in a castle or a knight on a horse. The associated script, the line of action, that is prompted might involve some sort of trouble, heroic action and, as a conclusion, marriage and penalty of the villains (120). Picturebooks are one way to communicate schemas and scripts to children, although they eventually exist in the readers’ minds and are accordingly brought to the text not vice versa. Coats argued that schemas and scripts are in fact not present in the text but rather in the reader alone, which would mean that authors and illustrators do not provide them in their picturebooks. This view is challenged though, as nobody can be fully aware of the subconscious, underlying schemata in their mind. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that readers and illustrators are completely free of stereotypes and schemas and, even if they were, it could still be assumed that they often introduce them deliberately, precisely because certain scripts should be evoked in the reader. It has been proven repeatedly that the categorization

of ideas and knowledge into schemas, just like stereotypes, is a simplification process to help organize the memory. Hence, evoking a schema while reading can enhance comprehension and recall of stories. However, this also carries the risk of schemas leading to false expectations and beliefs in terms of the reader being biased and noticing what they have expected to rather than what is really there. (Coats 120)

The acquisition of uneven binary gender schemata and scripts by children has been an issue for decades (Coats 120). Feminist theorists started to ask how they could be changed while linguists uncovered gender roles in picturebooks. While male characters were portrayed as active, clever and adventurous breadwinners, female ones were generally shown to be passive bystanders or helpless victims. Additionally, the schema of femininity was comprised of obedience, restraint and emotionality as opposed to masculinity, which consisted of transgressiveness, independence and analytic thinking (Coats 120). The much-cited “Weitzman study” (Weitzman et al.), already published in 1972, discussed how the representation of gender inequality affected pre-literate children. Picturebooks were described as “a vehicle for the presentation of societal values to the young child” (1126), hence, cultural ideology and role models were encountered in picturebooks. Weitzman et al. examined prize-winning picturebooks and revealed that, on the one hand, women were underrepresented in titles, characters and pictures. On the other hand, if they were depicted, the aforementioned stereotypical gender roles were reinforced (1125).

These findings were confirmed by Hamilton et al. (765) and Donna Ferguson more than four decades later. Ferguson discovered that female characters were entirely absent in 20% of the 100 most popular picturebooks in 2017. The central character was 50% more likely to be male, while female characters were 50% less likely to get the chance to speak. The character traits ascribed to the respective gender were similar to those identified by Weitzman et al. Male Characters were typically impersonated as “powerful, wild and potentially dangerous beasts, such as dragons, bears and tigers, while females tended to anthropomorphize to smaller and more vulnerable creatures such as birds, cats and insects” (Ferguson 2). This shows that Anthropomorphism, the creation of animal characters as protagonists, is not necessarily gender-neutral, even though elimination of central issues like age, gender

and social status would be possible when depicting animals rather than people (Nikolajeva and Scott, *How Pbs Work* 92). Only one of the 100 analyzed books featured a female villain, a fraction of the number of male villains portrayed, which conveys the impression that women and girls are still seen as obedient and caring instead of wild and adventurous. Caring roles were much more frequently ascribed to women, typically portrayed as teachers or mothers (Ferguson 3). Hamilton et al.'s study got similar results by examining 200 picturebooks. While women were predominantly portrayed indoors, caring for their children, men were more likely to be portrayed outdoors and without their families. Additionally, more men than women had a traditional, paid job (Hamilton et al. 757). However, sexism is not always portrayed as obvious, instead the reader's awareness towards symbolic sexism in visuals needs to be raised. Cues like placement, posture, eye contact with the reader, differences in height and occupation of space for male versus female characters can advert to subtle forms of gender stereotyping (Hamilton et al. 764). The role of sexism in picturebooks was emphasized again and the Weitzman study was confirmed once more, as it was highlighted how "stereotyped portrayals of the sexes and under-representation of female characters contribute negatively to children's development, limit their career aspirations, frame their attitudes about their future roles as parents, and even influence their personality characteristics" (Hamilton et al. 757). This view has been confirmed by various studies. Experimental research showed how sexist instructional material strengthened children's biases and how children aged three to five years chose more stereotypic toys after being read biased books (757). Considering how boys versus girls are represented in picturebooks this suggests that their self-confidence will either be boosted or undermined. However, not just the children's self-perception will change over time and develop a certain way, but also their appreciation of other genders will be altered. Children who attend kindergarten already begin to distinguish sexes and form gender stereotypes; therefore, their representation in picturebooks is so significant.

Gender representation influences boys and girls alike, hence, the role of boys and men in picturebooks requires examination as well. Hamilton et al. (758) observed an underrepresentation of fathers as active parents. This was further researched by Anderson and Hamilton, where they criticized the lack of "male characters in traditionally feminine gender roles" (Anderson and Hamilton 145). They examined 200



picturebooks, of which 64% featured mothers and 48% featured fathers. Mother-only scenes appeared twice as often as father-only scenes. Mothers were depicted as affectionate nurturers, while fathers were typically portrayed as merely hugging or carrying their children (145ff). Overall, the paternal role was underrepresented and depicted stereotypically, showing men in relation to their occupation, not their home. Fathers were hardly feeding their children or talking to them, and generally their behavior towards them was unaffectionate (149). Even though Koss (35f) reported that female main characters were often portrayed as spirited and resisting traditional gender role stereotypes, there was no male main character acting in a non-gender normative way. Coats (125) shared that view and highlighted that various authors and illustrators have been rejecting female gender stereotypes in the last decades by portraying girls as tomboys and celebrating courageous and adventurous girls. This attitude does not apply to male characters. Boys behaving in culturally construed feminine ways are considered uncommon, they are hardly portrayed as being sensitive and caring, for example. Thus, the boy schema differs fundamentally from the girl schema in the sense that it is still traditional, expecting male characters to be outgoing, adventurous and active (125). Gender stereotyping continues to be prevalent, which is problematic as it perpetuates gendered behavior in children (Koss 37). Ferguson (3) referred to parents who found a simplistic solution, equally suited for teachers; they simply changed pronouns in picturebooks while reading aloud. This suggestion can be valuable for anthropomorphized picturebooks, as referring to a wolf or a T. rex as “she” does not cause any trouble for the reader. However, the roles of men and women cannot be interchanged so easily as the pictures will mostly reveal the truth. Therefore, the roles of mothers and fathers, boys and girls are supposedly not exchangeable in the majority of picturebooks that easily.

Another gender issue to be emphasized is the underrepresentation of black girls in picturebooks. Race and racism in picturebooks will be discussed in the following chapter, however, the intersectional concern of race and gender is described at this point. Various initiatives have been implemented to raise awareness and to change that, one of them is #1000BlackGirlBooks, a campaign by Marley Dias (Scott 1). Dias was only 12 years of age when she founded the campaign. She has collected over 11.000 books whose main character is a black girl in three years (GrassRoots Community Foundation). The online resource guide is a response to repeated requests

of teachers, parents and students for picturebooks portraying a female, black main character. Marley Dias was chosen for the 30 under 30 by Forbes last year and was invited to speak at the United States of Women Summit, together with Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey (Forbes Media LLC). This campaign should be considered for the choice of picturebooks for Austrian kindergartens. The Resource Guide provided on the homepage is constantly updated; picturebooks can be found in the category “Visual Reader” (GrassRoots Community Foundation).

One major issue that has not been discussed in any of the literature quoted so far are genders besides the traditional roles of male and female. Even though all these studies concentrated on the issue of gender and its representation in picturebooks, none of them took other genders into consideration. This is a neglect that is not acceptable in the twenty-first century. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) identities are hardly represented in picturebooks. Young showed that an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum lead to a less hostile school climate in primary schools (62). Students identifying as LGBTQ experienced less harassment and insults, and they felt safer in their schools overall, which then resulted in fewer absences and disciplinary referrals. In general, students felt more accepted by and more closely connected to their classmates. Although sexuality is not yet an issue for kindergartners themselves, it might be for their parents, older siblings or other family members. Children are aware of social norms and recognize divergence from the norm, which can lead to harassment by their peers. Heteronormativity is still prevalent and already the youngest members of society are aware of that to a certain extent. One way of fostering tolerance is the implementation of LGBTQ picturebooks in kindergartens. Young (64) examined diversity in 28 award-winning picturebooks and diversity in gender was limited even there. All characters were identifiable as either male or female, excluding nonconforming gender or transgender. Furthermore, specific language and labels of the community were hardly mentioned, and the main characters were mostly straight. Hence, young learners might still perceive the identity of members of the LGBTQ community as secondary to heteronormativity. Therefore, teachers should include LGBTQ picturebooks to counteract this perception.

Overall, the representation of gender in picturebooks is complex and multimodal, and teachers need to consider picturebooks carefully to uncover that. Schemas and scripts are not always straightforward, neither are texts and illustrations generally. Gender roles in picturebooks require close examination to avoid stereotypically biased representation. In general, a larger variety and more diverse roles are indispensable for elementary education.

#### **4.3.2. Race**

As mentioned before, picturebooks are a valuable source to stimulate discussions about complex topics like race. However, there appears to be a common assumption that children might be too young to critically discuss such complicated topics. Husband (365) criticized that educators often avoided critical issues like race and apply “color blind” approaches because they assumed that children were not yet able to engage in these discussions. This led to false consciousness and aggravated racial oppression; therefore, Husband argued for more than multicultural education. He suggested specific anti-racist education in early childhood classrooms (365f), which differs from the former in terms of critique and reflection about ideologies, policies, practices and available materials in schools. Parents should be involved to expose “underlying oppressive agendas and power relationships and outcomes between individuals of different racial backgrounds” (366). This approach holds promise for multicultural groups of children, particularly if the parents do not know each other (well). Families can be more involved, and teachers might become aware of possible racist attitudes between various groups or families. Furthermore, it is a way of involving parents in picturebook selection, as educators might not always be aware of racial injustice or unauthentic representation. Critique and reflection are just one aspect of anti-racist education; however, it is the most relevant for the involvement of picturebooks in an Austrian kindergarten setting. Husband’s approach of involving children and providing space for stimulating conversations can be applied to diversity in general, as most children are keen observers and recognize differences. Teachers and parents should build upon this feature to provoke curiosity and teach them about the immense diversity of people. Window and mirror picturebooks can be thought-provoking, and informative resources at the same time. Walter Dean Myers, a voracious young reader, described

how, as a teenager, he was affected by the lack of diversity in books while he was beginning the quest for his own identity:

*“As I discovered who I was, a black teenager in a white-dominated world, I saw that these characters, these lives, were not mine. I didn’t want to become the ‘black’ representative, or some shining example of diversity. What I wanted, needed really, was to become an integral and valued part of the mosaic that I saw around me.”*

(Myers 2)

Myers completely lacked books acting as mirrors, those that would represent a black adolescent he could have related to. He was merely surrounded by window books which provided characters and cultures other than his own. As a result, he stopped reading and books became “like friends with whom I no longer felt comfortable” (2). Later, he dropped out of school and joined the Army, which subconsciously shaped his personality for the years to come, until he encountered a story by James Baldwin, located in Harlem, featuring black people like himself and those around him. “By humanizing the people who were like me, Baldwin’s story also humanized me.” (Myers 2). Hence, the absence of characters like himself in books influenced his self-awareness. Being a writer himself now, he highlights how important the recognition of oneself in stories is especially for children and adolescents, as it validates one’s existence as a person and acknowledges one’s values (3). Aronson (166) confirmed Myers’ view and highlighted how picturebooks “serve as didactic tools, promoting social norms, values, and expectations”. Absence of people of color establishes whiteness as the norm and at the same time devaluates and marginalizes people of color, which further normalizes racism.

The Cooperative Children’s Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison (CCBC) gather data and publish yearly statistics on children’s and young adult’s books about the depiction of African / African Americans, American Indians / First Nations, Asian Pacifics / Asian Pacific Americans and Latinx, visualized in the following illustration. They also record numbers about authors and publishers of color and first nations.

# DIVERSITY IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS 2018

Percentage of books depicting characters from diverse backgrounds based on the 2018 publishing statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison:  
ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp

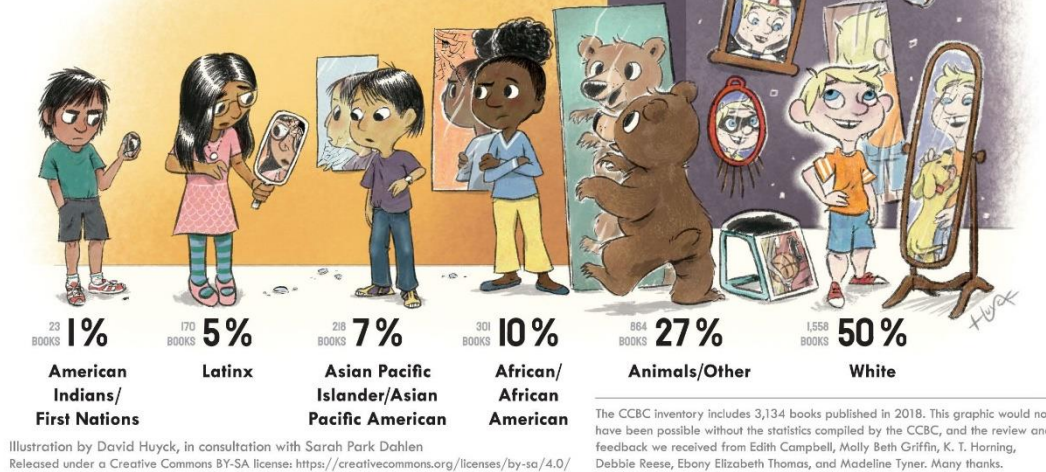


Fig. 2: Diversity in Children's Books

(Cooperative Children's Book Center <<https://readingspark.wordpress.com/2019/06/19/picture-this-diversity-in-childrens-books-2018-infographic/>>.)

Overall, a significant increase of characters, authors and illustrators of non-white origin can be noticed throughout the last years. African and African American people were featured in 10% of the books in 2018, which is more than double than in 2008. The numbers of books including Asian Pacifics / Asian Pacific Americans and those including Latinx even tripled, which makes 7% and 5% of the books. On average, there are three times as many authors and illustrators in each group compared to 2008. One specifically striking number concerns the group of American Indians / First Nations, who are the least represented group with solely 1%. Compared to 2008, there are four times as many authors with that background but only 30% more books featuring American Indians or First Nations were published. This development cannot be observed in any of the other categories, which leads to the assumption that the majority of authors and illustrators depicted people with the same cultural background as themselves, except American Indians / First Nations. This hypothesis, however, is not true. According to Kathleen Horning, director of CCBC (qtd. in Scott 2) only 3% of the books about black experiences were written or illustrated by Africans or African

Americans in 2017. She claimed that this was the reason for most published books about black people “fall[ing] into three broad categories: books about slavery, books set during the civil rights movement and books that tell ‘gritty, contemporary’ stories about children growing up in struggling families or teens dealing with violence” (Scott 2). Variety of themes and topics was absent, hence, most children have not been confronted with books showing a nonwhite middle-class family, for example.

Even though those numbers are promising, they do still not reflect reality, considering that about 50% of students at public schools in the United States are non-white (Scott 5). However, this does affect children with white skin color as well, if from another perspective. If they do not encounter any books that provide windows to other, equal cultures, they learn to class otherness with inferiority. Therefore, the portrayal of children with different skin color in picturebooks is insufficient - the depiction of diverse cultures and people engaging in everyday activities is required. Cross-group interactions should be depicted, showing children of different backgrounds and with a variety of skin colors having fun and sharing common interests. Similarities should be stressed rather than differences (Aronson et al. 167). However, Aronson et al. pointed out that “culturally neutral or color-blind literature” can also be problematic, as described in Husband (365) at the beginning of this chapter. The exclusion of topics like inequality and oppression of cultures or people can lead to the wrong assumption that they are irrelevant elements. Many books containing people of color avoid the depiction of culture or tradition and merely show physical characteristics like dark skin color or specific hair texture. Nevertheless, racism, power and privilege need representation as well, as they are a crucial period of history. This issue was also taken up by Mitchell, who described a “colorblind ideology that creates racism without racists” (347). In her study she examined how racism had altered in secondary multilingual learners and their teachers in the United States. She argued that race appeared to become irrelevant in our society, leading to postracialism, which is a “retreat from race”. This concept, however, does clearly not reflect reality in US secondary schools. Even though racist incidents have become less overt, research showed that multilingual learners were subjects to discrimination, most frequently from teachers (qtd. in Mitchell 347). Furthermore, conflicts based on racism and prejudices among and between different immigrant groups are an issue the US, which shows that racism is not only “prejudice based on skin color” but rather a matter of “systemic, institutional, and social

practices of power and privilege distribution” (342). Similar studies evaluating the situation in elementary education are not available, supposedly because data collection would pose a variety of problems. Children are still young and presumably not aware of the majority of the aforementioned concerns.

Aronson et al. (168) criticized that modern oppression was depicted insufficiently in picturebooks. In their study they identified the following nine themes encountered in picturebooks portraying underrepresented racial and cultural groups, in sequence of frequency: “Beautiful Life, Every Child, Biography, Folklore, Oppression, Cross-Group, Concept, Incidental, and Informational” (172). One third of the books were identified as portraying Beautiful Life, which were “stories with positive depictions of a particular racial or cultural group experience” (172). Picturebooks that fall into this category show the daily lives of their characters in various countries with explicit cultural components like language, food, celebrations or traditions. The topics in this category can also be sad or somber; however, oppression is not experienced due to the character’s racial or cultural background. In this category there is also the widest range of characters, including Black, Asian and Latinx each accounting for roughly one quarter of the characters. Native Peoples, Middle Eastern/Arab and Multiracial make up the last quarter (172). This result is quite positive, as it shows that neither color-blindness and postracialism nor oppression are the most identified issues. The study was only published in 2018, which hints to increased awareness of authors and illustrators considering the themes of their publications. Books that fall into the second category, Every Child, are what has been described as “color-blind”. However, this term inherits a certain negative connotation, which does not concur with Aronson et al.’s view. The main character is non-white, but the specific cultural background is not central to the story. Typically, the story is set in a middle-class US setting. Black people make up half the characters, all other races account for the other half (172). They point out that their term “Every Child” emphasizes not the erasure of cultural identity but the centrality and universality of protagonists of color representing all children” (178).

Both positions are valid and should be represented in any picturebook selection in Austrian kindergartens. Children need to encounter “Beautiful Life” books which show them non-white people living in other cultures, leading different lives than their own.

This way their curiosity for diversity can be aroused and they get the chance to learn about attitudes and mindsets, languages, food, traditions, living conditions etc. Otherwise, in case their own culture is depicted, they feel represented and valued. Additionally, the other themes identified are just as relevant and deserve consideration when selecting picturebooks, however, amplifying all of them would go beyond the scope of this thesis.

## 5. Vocabulary Acquisition from Picturebooks

Vocabulary acquisition is a crucial process in foreign language learning, particularly in kindergartens. There is a major focus on teaching semantics rather than pragmatics, syntax, morphology, phonology or phonetics in Austrian elementary education; at least according to my experience while accompanying twelve kindergarten teachers over three years. This approach was supposedly adopted due to the material that was suggested to pedagogues in further education, which involved flash cards as a primary teaching source. Hence, those handy cards formed the basis for many lessons held by those educators who had attended few or no further training in foreign language teaching. In my experience, lessons became richer in variety the more personal interest, motivation and professional expertise the teachers themselves had. One significant challenge was the collection of appropriate teaching materials for EFL lessons in kindergartens. I was repeatedly approached considering the suitability of various educational material for EFL lessons as many educators seemed to feel unqualified to make these decisions. This circumstance proved to be a setback for many motivated teachers, which is extremely unfortunate since the ministry could easily provide a collection of picturebooks, songs, chants, sing-alongs, games, tasks, exercises and other ideas. Instead, they merely suggest one book (*Little Ones – Englisch im Kindergarten*) which despite providing some ideas, songs and numerous flash cards, is by no means sufficient for teaching English regularly over many years. As a consequence, many teachers, including myself, put the central focus on the flash cards and utilized them in creative ways for a variety of games or during read-outs. Thus, the teaching and learning aims were primarily the acquisition of vocabulary, more precisely nouns as those were depicted considerably more often than verbs, adjectives, adverbs or prepositions. In fact, adjectives were the only other word class



illustrated in the flashcards provided by *Little Ones*, with a tight restriction to colors and numbers. Therefore, although all levels of the foreign language should have developed over time, preschool children's active English language knowledge initially mainly consisted of words for family members, animals, vehicles, colors and numbers. The young learners could not put these words in context, which rendered short conversations almost impossible. Picturebooks provide a more substantial and extensive introduction to a foreign language as words appear in context, which implies a greater variety of word classes. Moreover, learners acquire phrases rather than single words, which fosters communicative competence.

### **5.1. How do Children Learn Words?**

Teaching and learning words are a primary aim of English and multilingual lessons in Austrian elementary education. But what does "knowing a word" imply? Scott Thornbury claimed that it involves knowledge about its form and meaning; therefore, "knowing the meaning of a word is not just knowing its dictionary meaning (or meanings) – it also means knowing the words commonly associated with it (its collocations) as well as its connotations, including its register and its cultural accretions" (15). Language teachers should teach more than literal translations of words; however, knowing the full scope of a word cannot be expected from children at this young age, neither in their first nor in their second or third language. Picturebooks are a valuable resource to include collocations and connotations, register and cultural knowledge into language lessons. Children might not consciously acquire those language aspects or even be aware of them, but unconscious language learning should not be underrated. The distinction of receptive and productive language knowledge needs to be made at this point; in general the former exceeds the latter (Thornbury 15). The organization of vocabulary in our memory resembles a network or web rather than a dictionary. Words are not organized randomly or in the form of a list, instead, the mental lexicon is systematized efficiently, and its areas are closely interconnected (Thornbury 16). These interconnections happen in two ways, first, words with similar forms and sound structures are connected. Second, words with similar or shared meaning are connected, like all animal or family terms. Hence, the brain is organized semantically, meaning based, as well as morphologically, form based (17).

There is a connection to personal memory and world knowledge, which means personal experience and general knowledge are also triggered through the activation of a word. Therefore, knowing a word includes “semantic, syntactic, phonological, orthographic, morphological, cognitive, cultural and autobiographical” connections on the side of each individual learner (17). Language teachers need to be aware of that and individualize not only their lesson plans in general but also the specific focus of their teaching. Even though kindergartners are quite young, each of the aforementioned connections vary in a heterogeneous group. Learners have different phonological background knowledge depending on their first language, for example. Educators need to adapt their teaching and learning aims to each group of children and then individualize their specific aims even further. This highly complex process requires professional and social competence along with background knowledge about the learners.

Vocabulary acquisition in general varies between first and second language. Overall, vocabulary learning involves labelling, categorizing and network building (Thornbury 18). Labelling is the recognition of concepts and according words, like the knowledge that the term “dog” refers to a specific four-legged animal. Categorizing skills then include boundaries of this term, like the knowledge that a stuffed animal can be a dog too. Network building refers to the “complex web of words”, which implicates knowledge about super- and subordinate terms (Thornbury 18). Children who attend kindergartens have typically already acquired a first language; therefore, they are already equipped with a mental lexicon. Thornbury (18f) argues that they should develop a separate conceptual system for the second language. This is the case for all learners of another language; rather than just learning new words and integrating them into the pre-existing mental lexicon, a new one should be developed for each language acquired. Hence, simplified translations and synonym lists are counterproductive because words, even if a similar one exists in the first language, can vary regarding connotations, collocations, register and other aspects. The degree of integration of the L2 mental lexicon into the L1 mental lexicon has been much discussed. Singleton (“Integrated Mental Lexicon”) argued for a high degree of cross-lexical connectivity, nevertheless, separation is relevant. New languages are acquired

in relation to the ones previously learned and lexical resources of established languages are prioritized, which leads to the conclusion that multilingual lexical knowledge cannot be unitary (13). Singleton ("Cross-Lexical Interaction") showed that there are supporters for both sides, complete separation of languages versus full integration of L1 and L2 in the mental lexicon. Cook (2) argued for multi-competence, implying that two or more languages are included in the speaker's mind. She described a "language super-system at some level rather than completely isolated items" (2). Consequently, the bi- or multilingual speaker is multi-competent and capable of mastering different languages that are not completely isolated systems in their mind. Singleton ("Cross-Lexical Interaction" 54) also referred to evidence for cross-lexical interaction, proving rather close connectedness between L1 and L2 mental lexicon. For the scope of this thesis, Singleton's view will be adopted who, as described before, argues for close interconnection between different languages in the speaker's mind. Educators teaching English and other foreign languages in kindergartens should be familiar with that as particularly young children with another L1 than German might face different challenges in EFL or multilingual lessons in Austria, depending on their first language. These challenges can occur on all levels, from words and translations as such to phonological variations. The competent and attentive teacher will employ this to advantage and support the learners individually. This, again, presupposes professional expertise along with sensitivity and attentiveness towards the children.

Although different languages co-exist in one mind and interact with one another, there are variations between L1 and L2 vocabulary acquisition, one of them being the potential size of the lexicon. While a native speaker knows around 20000 words, the average adult L2 learner only knows around 5000, which is a consequence of considerably less exposure (Thornbury 20). Moreover, the input differs greatly in first versus second language learning as infants receive adjusted speech and wording, typically characterized by interaction, repetition and structuring (20). These are ideal learning conditions to acquire and remember new vocabulary. Memory is subdivided into short-term, working and long-term memory. Permanent content is stored in the long-term memory, therefore, the aim of vocabulary learning is the transfer of words from short-term memory to long-term memory, where knowledge is accumulated and stored over time. Thornbury (20) summarized the following strategies to ensure the transformation of words into the long-term memory: repetition, retrieval from memory,

spacing or distributed practice, pacing, use, cognitive depth, personal organizing, imaging, mnemonics, motivation, attention/arousal and affective depth (24f). All these methods suppose conscious vocabulary learning to a different degree. Language teachers should apply a variety of methods to ensure maximum learning achievements in all children participating in the teaching sequences in their groups. All learners have the possibility to encounter the ideal learning strategy for themselves if a combination of Thornbury's strategies is offered. A variety of methods in language teaching allows the teacher to individualize to a certain degree. All of these strategies can be adopted while or after picturebook read-alouds in kindergartens if appropriate books are chosen (see chapter 6).

## **5.2. Target Words**

Setting the parameters for vocabulary selection can be a challenge for teachers. Which words are relevant and should consciously be chosen as target words? Picturebooks include a great variety of vocabulary and teachers need to decide which ones they want to prioritize and teach explicitly. Besides that, incidental learning plays a major role when reading books, of which more in the following chapter. Considering that the vast majority of children are absolute EFL beginners and cannot draw upon English background knowledge yet, words need to be explained, highlighted, repeated and taken out of context to ensure transformation into the long-term memory (see previous chapter). Research has shown that people naturally acquire new words primarily from spoken interaction and to a fewer extend through written language alone. Context is the crucial factor for learning, which implies that unknown words occur in text rather than in isolated form (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, chapter 1). Hence, picturebooks are a perfect tool for teaching vocabulary if read out by a teacher who consciously decontextualizes certain terms to support the learning process, as the words are presented in sentences and stories. Most kindergarten educators might expect some guidelines for that choice to be provided by their institution or government, as I did. The documents provided by the government, as described in chapter 2, are the curricula for Austria, Lower Austria and the guidelines for multilingualism in kindergartens (Boeckmann et al.). None of them offers any information considering parameters for vocabulary selection or topic areas. The Lower Austrian curriculum states that books addressing search for identity, emotions, handling of emotions and

social situations, and topics that deal with the children's families (p6) should be addressed in kindergartens. Although these requirements are not stated in relation to foreign language teaching, an implementation in English picturebook readings can be beneficial as well.

Beck, McKeown and Kucan (chapter 2) argued that vocabulary learning "resides in children's environments and experiences: what they hear, see, are told, read, and the like". This reflects the topic areas described in the curricula, as family, emotions and search for identity are relevant in kindergartner's developmental stage. The choice of target words should be in accordance with the learner's environments and experiences; this approach is also described in the curricula for English lessons at school. Kindergarten teachers are competent in making those decisions as they are familiar with the children's individual developmental status. Another approach for the choice of target words is the categorization of words according to "their role and utility in the language" (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, chapter 2). Possible selection criteria are frequency or utility; hence, more frequent or more practical words are taught first. The benefit of this method for foreign language teaching in elementary education is limited though, as role and utility of words might be irrelevant for young children at the time. If vocabulary is chosen in accordance with their environments and experiences, an incorporation into their complex mental lexicon is more likely, as connections to pre-existing knowledge can be made. Collins (89) suggested the following criteria, which she applied for the selection of words in her own study:

- (1) applicability to the story: target words had to make sense within the text*
- (2) frequency of occurrence: target words had to be able to occur twice in the story*
- (3) ability to be illustrated: target words had to be depicted within the illustrations upon both occurrences within the text*
- (4) unfamiliarity of word: target words had to be unknown to children. [...]*

The target words were not already present in the text, instead they were consciously selected according to the criteria and inserted into the stories in order to ensure validity of the research. Thereby, sophistication level, number of occurrences, the word's adequate illustration and novelty for the learners was guaranteed. This approach is not necessary in the kindergarten situation; nevertheless, criteria 1 to 3 are useful there as

well. Target words should be applicable to the story and make sense to the children; they should occur more than once in different contexts and expressive illustrations can foster comprehension and memory.

During my own teaching, I learned that providing educators with a specific list of target words is challenging as kindergartens are highly diverse, depending on a variety of external and internal factors. Most kindergartens have an overall topic or focus that changes each year, like health/nutrition, environmental protection or art. These topics are explored over the year, typically there are some shared overarching projects and besides that, each teacher can implement their own ideas, concepts or narrower focus. Additionally, a “kindergarten year” consists of many signposts, like (religious) holidays, Halloween or carnival. In my experience, educators have roughly one topic per month, like fall in September, Christmas in December, snow in January or Mother’s Day in May. According to those topics, picturebooks, handicrafts, drawings, games, songs and/or chants are chosen. During the planning period of EFL or multilingual lessons, the teacher should consider them. On the one hand, it can make sense to tie in with these topics, as they are relevant to most children at the time. On the other hand, it can make sense to introduce other issues as sometimes the learners have grown tired of the topics discussed, this proved to be the case specifically with the preschool five-year-olds. The heterogeneity of kindergarten groups must be considered as well, as interests and preferences vary. I repeatedly experienced how one picturebook, game or song attracted wide interest in one group, while boring children in the other. Overall, the choice of target words depends on a variety of factors, therefore a list cannot be provided at this juncture. The competent and informed teacher can make a professional decision geared to the needs of their young learners to ensure maximum learning success.

### **5.3. How to Incorporate EFL Picturebooks in the Daily Routine**

Scholars generally agree on the distinction of incidental and intentional learning. Studies have repeatedly demonstrated that incidental vocabulary learning is promoted by (shared) readings in the first language and foreign languages likewise. The exposure to extensive English language input, for example through readings, supports children in their language development and vocabulary learning (Thornbury 22).

Collins (84) studied preschoolers' English vocabulary acquisition from storybook reading, when books were repeatedly read to the children over the course of three weeks. The experimental groups were divided, while one of them was listening to the readings and additionally got detailed descriptions of target vocabulary, the other was only exposed to the read-outs without further explanations. Collins described that incidental learning was prompted by simply being exposed to the language; nevertheless, vocabulary development of preliterate children was fostered by explicit instructions during the reading and tasks or activities afterwards (85). Collins showed how rich explanations, repeated exposure to the vocabulary over a few weeks and small group sizes significantly increased the children's vocabulary knowledge. Other factors that influenced the learning outcome were extremely individual and can only be influenced by kindergarten institutions to some extent, like home reading practices, first language, memory, motivation or relationship between teacher and learners (94f). During the study, the following while-reading activities were provided:

- (1) pointing to the illustration of the target word [...]*
  - (2) providing a general definition of the word [...]*
  - (3) providing a synonym [...]*
  - (4) making a gesture of the word, when applicable [...]*
  - (5) using the word in a context different from that of the book [...]*
- (Collins 88)

These strategies were also used by the teachers I accompanied, as well as during my own teaching. In my experience, showing the respective pictures while reading proved to be one of the simplest and most effective methods. On the contrary, providing synonyms and definitions was often challenging as the young learners' English vocabulary was extremely limited. Considering gestures, my experience concords with Collins' who mentions that gestures could only be made for some of the words. I repeatedly experienced how the gestures and the according words were remembered well by young learners. Children typically copied the gestures I made while repeating the words, which shows the validity of TPR (see chapter 5.3.1.1). Overall, Collins' ideas considering explanations for unknown vocabulary are hands-on and straightforward; therefore, they can easily be introduced in elementary education. They are particularly more promising than simple translations, for the reasons described in the previous chapters.

The pedagogical effects and benefits of shared readings on the development of vocabulary in L1 and L2 have been proven repeatedly. When Taiwanese EFL beginners aged 9 to 14 years were asked about the difficulties when reading English picturebooks on their own, the majority named vocabulary as the key challenge (Hsiu-Chih 192f). Hsiu-Chih highlighted the importance of the teacher for young EFL beginners, also in primary school. The students described how they faced major challenges with difficult vocabulary while reading EFL picturebooks and they wished for a teacher to read the stories out for them. Most students did not feel confident in reading aloud themselves due to struggles with vocabulary and pronunciation; furthermore, they felt that a teacher reading out picturebooks would improve their listening skills. Hence, Hsiu-Chih (193) described “the teacher as a mediator of the text to children”. This approach can be adopted by teachers in elementary education and primary schools alike. The student’s perspective is also a reminder for teachers to focus on more than single words and explanations. In an examination of their teaching objectives for read-alouds, only one third of the teachers focused on vocabulary, while 10% concentrated on phonics, 11% focused on fluency and 9% aimed at general understanding. Additionally, 14% intended to foster positive attitude towards English learning and one quarter taught sentence patterns and grammar (Yang 27). This shows that most EFL teachers are skills-oriented and incorporate picturebooks for various learning activities and instructions. Albeit the observed teachers were teaching at elementary school rather than in kindergartens, their students were still EFL beginners and reading fluently was a competence not yet acquired by the majority. Therefore, these teaching objectives can be adopted for younger children in a similar way.

### **5.3.1. Involvement**

Shared read-alouds do not imply that children are mere passive listeners. Instead, they can be involved in numerous ways, ensuring that they stay active. Involvement is a major tool to maintain concentration and motivation, which are lost all too quickly by children aged two to five years. Sipe (“Talking Back” 476) described forms of literary response by young children as “expressive, performative engagement”, which involved oral responses like music, art or drama to picture storybooks. Children compare and contrast the stories they hear to other stories but also other cultural products. Hence,



a story read out from a picturebook might trigger other experiences and knowledge in the child and remind them of a song or movie, for example. This is highly individual and can hardly be influenced by teachers; however, this way of responding to stories can be a source for learning and should be valued as a resource rather than an interruption or annoyance. Sipe (*Storytime* 230) described how teachers often expect silence while reading out and do not allow the listeners to interfere. Children need to sit and listen to the story quietly, saving responses until the end. This approach was criticized, as it is an “adult view of what constitutes the proper way of experiencing literature” and may not be the most productive strategy for kindergartners (230). In Austrian kindergartens this is still a common way of reading books to larger groups, supposedly as otherwise no book could be finished because children would constantly respond with stories and ideas that are often only remotely related to the one from the picturebook. I frequently encountered these problems in all the groups I visited, also in my own teaching. In my opinion, the only solution for that are smaller groups. If books are read to groups of two to four children, responses can be encouraged, and children get the chance to fully benefit from the lessons. However, the organizational structure of kindergartens, with one teacher and one nursery worker for 15 to 20 children, renders this almost impossible. In my experience, educators do agree with Sipe’s criticism overall, they simply lack the resources to do so. Whenever I observed teachers reading books to small groups, almost all of them encouraged the children’s response and performative engagement, regardless of whether the language in the picturebooks was German or English. In discussions afterwards the vast majority confirmed that their intention was to encourage the learners in that regard and often the personal benefit for themselves was mentioned as well. Most educators enjoyed reading to few children to allow interaction. One challenge mentioned frequently considered the kind of involvement of children while reading books in English or other foreign languages. Many teachers felt insecure about engaging the young readers/listeners in a fruitful way. Hence, I started to research and test a variety of strategies over the years, the following proved to be the most successful.

#### 5.3.1.1. Dramatizing and Total Physical Response (TPR)

Dramatizing is one of the most natural responses learners express while listening to stories and looking at picturebooks. Children act in nonverbal or verbal ways by spontaneously imitating the actions of the characters illustrated, for example. On the

one hand, they copy spoken language, intonation and pronunciation, on the other hand, they perform the characters' actions and gestures. Sipe ("Talking Back" 477) and Adomat (207) both stated this type of expressive engagement as highly relevant. Adomat (208) highlighted the significance of nonverbal articulation further and described mime and gesture as a crucial method of expressing meaning and understanding. Physical response can be a subconscious involvement with the story and should be appreciated by the teacher. Both scholars did not discuss "Total Physical Response" or TPR although it is well-established and researched for this method, for reasons unknown. TPR is a particularly popular approach in teaching young foreign language learners. Sariyati showed that six-year-old EFL learners benefitted from TPR instructions. They acquired English vocabulary, including "numbers, colors, things in the classroom, animals, and fruits" (55) in a more relaxed atmosphere and remembered more words than the control group who was instructed with conventional methods (57f). The young English learners responded well to TPR and enthusiastically participated in the lessons. Sariyati proved that children's knowledge improved significantly if they were engaged in an enjoyable activity that allowed them to physically move around while learning new words (61). One drawback was the fact that some learners got overexcited and started overacting (62).

In my experience, this is a valid point, as in most groups there is at least one child who enjoys entertaining his/her colleagues, and TPR is a possible method to show that. This can be problematic as, first, this child does probably not gain knowledge because he/she does not listen anymore. Second, the other children are distracted, and attention shifts from the teacher to that child. However, kindergarten teachers are familiar with this situation and will not have any difficulty with handling the situation. Sariyati's observations also showed that some students appeared shy and less enthusiastic; they "did not laugh a lot just kept smiling" (60). However, this behavior cannot be interpreted as a lack of interest or rejection of the method, as by nature some children are shier and more withdrawn than others. In my experience, TPR often proved to be a particularly successful method for the integration and motivation of shy and insecure learners who were not confident in speaking English (yet). Via dramatizing and TPR they can show their linguistic knowledge without having to speak. The youngest children in Austrian kindergartens are under three years old and they are often not fluent in their first language yet or have difficulty uttering some sounds.

This provides a challenge for the teacher, as determining the child's ability, knowledge and understanding can be tricky. Dramatizing and TPR repeatedly proved beneficial as many young or shy learners who refused to speak still participated in those readings. One extremely successful picturebook in that sense was *From Head to Toe* by Eric Carle. The language is simple, basic and repetitive while engaging the readers in some actions, like turning their heads or clapping their hands. The children frequently asked for the book during my lessons and enjoyed acting out. While the older and more fluent speakers could already understand the words, the younger ones simply copied the visual illustrations or their older friends, which was a great way of including all learners without discouraging or overwhelming anyone. After some repetitions the youngest typically comprehended the words as well and acted without seeing the pictures, which showed a learning process.

#### 5.3.1.2. Characterization and Talking Back

A similar, though slightly more advanced, approach towards interaction with literature are drama techniques, like role play or acting. Learners can actively be involved in the storytelling via characterizations. Children can impersonate the characters in the picturebooks in a shared reading and specific roles can be allocated (Adomat 215). This assumes understanding and empathy; moreover, meaning making of the text is fostered by actors and listeners alike. Besides organizing stage productions, which might be too time-consuming and overwhelming for young children, characterizations can be done spontaneously. One particularly beneficial picturebook for this method was *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed* by Eileen Christelow. This picturebook was an all-time favorite with the vast majority of EFL learners in my kindergarten groups. The text is repetitive and basically consists of five sentences, slightly adapted to each situation. Role cards for the anthropomorphized characters were fabricated and distributed before the introduction of the book. Depending on the role, the child either had to focus on movement (as monkey), gesturing and caring (as mother) or speaking and shouting (as doctor). The most prominent role was the most complex one of the doctor, which allowed the most creative interpretation of text. It required empathy and identification with the character to adapt one's voice, intonation, pitch and volume to the situation. The line "no more monkeys jumping on the bed" was expressed repeatedly, only the illustrations visualized the doctor's growing anger, which was good entertainment value for the learners. An added advantage was the fact that most

children aimed at participating in more than one role, which lead to many repetitions of the story and therefore supported the memorization of the phrases, including intonation and pronunciation (see chapter 5.1). The repeated readings also proved effective for improving pronunciation.

Another way of expressing engagement is “talking back to the story or characters” (Sipe, “Talking Back” 477). This technique is for more advanced learners; however, many preschoolers practiced it unconsciously during read outs. They often commented on the plot and the characters’ actions, which showed comprehension and interest. Sipe (“Talking Back” 481) described that teachers can encourage talking back by “accepting and valuing such responses when they occur”. They should act as model and example, by responding to and commenting on the stories themselves. Even though Sipe did not address EFL teachers, I tested this approach in my own lessons. I agree with his view as I experienced how the encouragement of comments could motivate the listeners and maintain their interest in the story, although most remarks were in German rather than English.

Overall, Sipe (“Talking Back” 479) named four variables that influence whether children actively participate in the readings as described above. First, cultural context was cited, which was “the culturally constructed attitude and stance towards stories, both oral and written” (480). This view is challenging, as the child’s cultural context is difficult to determine. What or who is regarded as “cultural context”? Does it involve only the family, the place of residence, the language, wealth, country, friends of the child or rather a mixture of all those? I agree that family and friends’ attitude can influence the child’s; however, this impact is by no means indispensable and the description of “cultural context” as given by Sipe can easily be construed as racist. Second, individual reader characteristics are relevant for possible active involvement. These include personal experience with storybooks and texts as such. In this context, the family background is certainly relevant, since the experiences children have made while reading at home influence their behavior. Depending on the situation during read-alouds at home, the child has either experienced reinforcement or discouragement considering responses. This presupposes that shared readings are a common activity at home, which cannot be assumed for all kindergartners. Third, Sipe (“Talking Back”

480) mentioned textual characteristics and teacher/classroom characteristics as relevant factors which either encourage or discourage responses. Picturebooks could encourage participation to varying degrees and not all stories invited responses. Finally, the teacher had enormous influence on the situation, as described before. A positive, relaxed atmosphere along with a place where children feel secure and supported was of major importance for the child's motivation and engagement.

#### 5.3.1.3. Interactive Features

Novelty picturebooks, as described in chapter 4, actively involve the reader/listener with movable parts that can be manipulated (Graham 217). Most learners are delighted about the engagement in the story-reading. Teachers, parents and book designers are acutely aware of that, which is the reason for innumerable creative ideas and realizations. Publishers provide books that involve their readers in a variety of ways. Children can feel embossing and textures, pull tabs, lift flaps, rotate wheels or discs, flip half-pages, inspect holes, marvel at pop-ups and explore plackets, pockets, envelopes, or inserts. The physical character and material aspects of the picturebook are highlighted, which results in a combination of books and toys (Kümmerling-Meibauer, "New Millennium" 252). Picturebook design is innovative and provides various opportunities considering usage of what Kümmerling-Meibauer (252) named "hybrid book-toys". A book can be shaped like a car including rotating wheels and therefore allow the reader to cruise on the floor, for example. Pop-ups provide the reader with a three-dimensional display and various pockets can increase tension if included in the story. Some publishers even provide the reader with odors; hence, they allow the reader to smell what is being described by rubbing specifically marked spots in the book. Another approach is the integration of material book aspects into the story, like in Oliver Jeffers' *The Incredible Book Eating Boy*. The main character is a boy who loves eating books and his development is visualized via illustrations and materiality, as the pages are often torn and look like someone bit off the corners. This symmetrical relationship between text and illustrations or materiality (Nikolajeva and Scott, *How Pbs Work* 14) actively engages the reader and the dual representation requires comprehension of the story, which can be challenging for EFL beginners. The teacher might need to scaffold and explain to ensure that the preschoolers realize these variances and therefore fully grasp the story. The following examples of picturebooks

with physical elements proved particularly successful in my teaching: *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar's Finger Puppet Book* by Eric Carle, *Where's Mr. Lion?* by Ingela P. Arrhenius and *The Gruffalo Touch and Feel Book* by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler.

Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* has been a classic picturebook in (Austrian) kindergartens for decades. 50 million copies in over 62 languages have been sold worldwide since its publication 50 years ago (Fetters 1). A copy of the book is bought somewhere around the world every thirty seconds (O'Connor 1), which results in an enormous variety of secondary literature. As every Austrian kindergarten teacher is aware of the book and its potential, it is only briefly discussed in this thesis. "[T]he reasons for our ongoing love affair with children's fiction's greediest hero" appear to be manifold, however, the combination of theme, topics, style, art and physical holes in the pages form its fascination (Taylor 1f). "[I]ts effortless fusion of story and educational concepts, its striking visual style, and the timelessness of both its aesthetic and its content" are part of its enduring appeal (Fetters 2). The picturebook provides a variety of topics that can be discussed in EFL lessons; it can be used to teach the days of the week, numbers, fruits and other food, colors, nutrition in general, or metamorphosis. The physical features and materiality of the book are a relevant part of it. It consists of four half-pages, each being slightly longer than the previous one, reflecting the number of fruits illustrated on it. The bigger the pages get, the fatter the caterpillar becomes. The pages have holes in them that illustrate the caterpillar's bites and journey. All these features, including its repetitive structure, broaden understanding on the side of the reader / listener and can therefore foster language learning and vocabulary acquisition. As mentioned before, a variety of topics can be taught via *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, which makes the book a valid resource in EFL teaching. There are numerous other editions like *The Very Hungry Caterpillar's Finger Puppet Book*, which contains a caterpillar finger puppet attached to the book that allows the reader to actively play with the "hybrid book-toy" (Kümmerling-Meibauer, "New Millennium" 252). An additional advantage of this picturebook is that its popularity has led to an enormous amount of available supplementary material, like coloring books, riddles, flash cards, dolls, games, songs, videos, an audiobook, ebook and apps are provided by publishers, teachers and parents. This facilitates involvement of children and their families. Although the book has become a classic and has enormous potential for EFL

education, I personally did not read the book out too frequently. In my experience, most Austrian kindergartners were already familiar with it, as it had been addressed and discussed by most teachers. They had read the book out to the children in German and had presented a variety of supplementary material. Therefore, particularly the older learners' interest towards the English version of the book was often rather limited and they preferred "new" books. Hence, once again, the role of the teacher is decisive considering the success of the picturebook. If it is originally implemented in English or in a multilingual version, the readers will be more interested and attentive, which will increase the learning success.

Another popular English picturebook with physical features proved to be *Where's Mr. Lion?* by Ingela P. Arrhenius. "A hide-and-seek book for sharing with a very tiny person" is its description on its back cover, which refers to felt flaps and a mirror. The book barely provides a story; however, the text is highly repetitive simple language that requires little to no previous language knowledge, which makes it perfect for EFL lessons with the youngest children in kindergarten. One question is asked on each doublespread, referring to the location of the animal in the illustration, like "Where's Mrs. Giraffe?" (1-2) or "Where's Mr. Crocodile?" (3-4). Behind the felt flaps, the reader can find the respective animal, including "Here she/he is!". On the last doublespread the reader is addressed directly by being asked "And where are you?" followed by a mirror behind the flap. The target audience are native English speakers up to two years old, yet, the basic, repetitive language and active involvement of learners increase its usefulness for young EFL learners. Children of up to four years enjoyed the book and frequently asked for it. Potential target vocabulary for English lessons are the interrogative particle "where", the names for the animals or the personal pronouns "he" and "she".

*The Gruffalo Touch and Feel Book* by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler is a simplified version of *The Gruffalo* by the same author and illustrator. Most Austrian kindergartners are familiar with *The Gruffalo* because the picturebook is provided in most kindergartens. As the name suggests, the *Touch and Feel Book* includes some physical features, like embossing and textures of the terrible teeth, wobbly knees, poisonous wart, black tongue, purple prickles and the Gruffalo's soft hair and fur. The

target audience are, again, toddlers which is indicated by a badge saying “my first Gruffalo”. Despite similar features as *Where’s Mr. Lion*, language and story are more advanced. The verses rhyme and address the reader directly in some places, like “Do your knees feel knobbly too?” (3-4) or “Do you dare to touch it?” (5-6). Those direct questions to the reader are printed in italics, presumably to highlight that they are not part of the storyline. Possible target vocabulary can be body parts, colors or more specific vocabulary like terrible, touch, help, asleep or kiss goodnight. However, the greatest potential of the book is its usefulness to teach pronunciation, intonation and stress. The majority of children are already familiar with the phrases, rhymes and words in German, as outlined before. This, in combination with the illustrations and physical elements of the book, makes explanations and translations redundant and allows a focus on other elements of the language. Children can be involved easily, for example by touching the relevant parts of the book to feel what is being described, or by showing their own body parts,. The readers grasped the meaning of the words for teeth, toes, knees, nose, eyes, tongue and back typically quickly, without further explanations. Sometimes little competitions emerged, where every child wanted to be the first to show their toes, eyes or tongue, which was a further entertainment and motivation for everyone involved. Moreover, the youngest learners could easily be involved as they simply copied their older peers’ actions after feeling the book’s physical elements. Consequently, *The Gruffalo Touch and Feel Book* is also a valuable resource for multilingual education as the lines can be translated without detailed explanations for the children to understand the storyline. Julia Donaldson, the author, even organized a multilingual “Gruffalo day” where she inspired and motivated students and teachers alike.

Manipulative features are supposed to support language development, they are no guarantee though. Tare et al. (399) showed that toddlers up to three years struggled with dual representation, particularly if 3D pop-up elements were involved children learned less. They assumed that learners were distracted by flaps, pull-tabs and other manipulative features and their attention to the content of the book was diverted. However, they argued that in a more naturalistic setting, adults would typically involve children through “conversational scaffolding” and take more time “to explore the manipulative on each page as well as learn factual information” (400). Nevertheless, if adult input was levelled, the type of picturebook affected the learning outcome. Tare et



al. examined L1 learning but it can be assumed that the results are also valid for EFL and multilingual learning, possibly to an even greater extent because code-switching is an additional challenge. These results do not suggest a complete omission of manipulative elements though. The authors argued that interest and learning success were not necessarily fostered through irrelevant add-ons but were rather hindered (400). Relevance is the key element, as well as a focus on the young age of the study participants. Nevertheless, teachers should be aware of these facts and consider the results in their book choices. If books include physical elements and / or manipulative features, they should be relevant to the story and the children should get sufficient time to process all levels of the book. Moreover, scaffolding is required to support the learning process.

Sound effects are a less common feature in picturebooks, and they are of limited significance for EFL lessons in kindergartens as typically the educators read out books to the learners and produce the sound effects with their voices. There are hardly any studies focusing on the role of picturebook sound effects on language learning. Kümmerling-Meibauer ("New Millennium" 252) described a new trend of built-in chips which "produce noises, such as animal sounds, jolly rhymes, and even the flush of a toilet". These sounds are supposed to involve the reader in a similar way as physical elements or odors. Children can experience these picturebooks with all their senses. Tare et al.'s (399) results presumably apply here as well, meaning that the sounds should be relevant to the story rather than merely entertaining. Furthermore, readers need enough time to process the multimodal information presented. If an adult person provides scaffolding and guides the young learner through the book, sound effects can be entertaining and might even support language learning.

Another approach towards sound effects and interactive features is briefly discussed as I encountered it in all the kindergartens. In addition, many children brought it as an example English book from their homes: *tiptoi® Wir lernen Englisch* by Constanze Schargan and Inka Friese. It belongs to the genre of "wimmelbooks", which are picturebooks without text that provide a variety of characters, details and scenes on each doublespread (Kümmerling-Meibauer, "New Millennium" 249; also see chapter 4.1). The authors of *tiptoi® Wir lernen Englisch* aim at teaching the English language

and culture playfully by offering funny dialogues, exciting stories and great games (Ravensburger). All this entertainment works with the *tiptoi*® pen that is used to touch pictures. The child should learn vocabulary, grammar and culture via small integrated speakers; in addition, games and songs are provided (Ravensburger). In my experience, the learners enjoyed this variety of wimmelbooks, as it allowed them to interact with the book privately without the need for an adult to read aloud. Most children were already familiar with the *tiptoi*® series and did not require further instruction. I argue that this is a major advantage, as it gives children the opportunity to retreat from the rush and noise that is sometimes inevitable in a group of roughly fifteen children. The readers enjoy their independence as they can decide what to learn and listen to themselves. Therefore, *tiptoi*® *Wir lernen Englisch* can be a valuable supplementary resource to support language learning. However, this implies that it lacks what has been emphasized before: the language teacher as a mediator between picturebook and reader. I often experienced how children were extremely excited about showing me their book and attempted to listen to multiple words, songs or games simultaneously. They overwhelmed themselves, which did certainly not foster their language acquisition. Furthermore, I frequently experienced that they started a game and when they faced difficulty, no problem-solving strategy was applied. Instead, the child touched another image to listen to something else or start another game – they lacked support. On the other hand, some children performed songs that they had not encountered anywhere else than in the book, which demonstrated a learning success. Overall, the learning achievements are scarcely identifiable if no educational objective is formulated in advance; therefore, the success of this book category in the Austrian kindergartens setting is difficult to determine. If these wimmelbooks are introduced as supplementary material to English lessons for children to use individually, they will have considerable potential though. Words can be repeated, and songs or games engage the reader in playful learning.

All these suggestions serve as an inspiration for language teachers in Austrian kindergartens. Overall, it has been shown that the involvement of young children in the reading process is highly beneficial and supports the learning process. Learners who are encouraged and engaged in read-alouds will enjoy them more and learn to appreciate picturebooks. As described in chapter 5.1, vocabulary acquisition is more

lasting if readers are active and motivated, as that way new words are transferred to the long-term memory.

#### **5.4. Family Involvement**

One key aspect of teaching a foreign language to young children is the involvement of their parents. This can slide into obscurity in the daily kindergarten routine, as English or multilingual teaching is not one of the main aims. Involvement of parents can be a challenge and requires parent-teacher conferences and regular letters to the parents. It is particularly relevant for children whose L1 is not German, including linguistic minority speakers, as their families are primary reference persons considering plurilingualism and facilitation of linguistic development (McGilp 34; also see chapter 2). Parents speaking minority languages might feel excluded from the educational process and their participation should therefore be encouraged. As described before, multilingual picturebooks are a valuable resource for the integration of other languages. They can serve both ways, as English resources for the family and as L1 resources in kindergarten. Therefore, they should also be available for the families, besides being read in the kindergarten setting. Parents should be granted access to appropriate multilingual picturebooks to enable shared reading experiences in the home setting. They should be made aware of the role of literature and be encouraged to read those selected picturebooks together with their children. Schrodts et al. (590) described the family setting as the primary learning environment next to the classroom setting; therefore, kindergarten teachers and parents should cooperate to ensure appropriate language learning opportunities. Family response journals are one approach to involve a variety of languages and cultures (Schrodts et al. 589). This idea can be implemented in Austrian elementary education as well. Linguistically and culturally relevant literature can be chosen by the teacher, which can then be taken home by all learners. Parents are asked to read the books with their children and to keep a response journal. Their implementation is supposed to lead to increased cultural sensitivity and sense of belonging; furthermore, mutual respect and empathy should be fostered.

Lending libraries are another common approach in Austrian kindergartens. Parents and children are encouraged to borrow various picturebooks with different topics and

themes throughout the year. Some kindergartens provide more public bookcases, where parents and children cannot only take books home but also bring some to the kindergarten. Learners are invited to share their favorite books with their peers, no matter in what language they are written. This can result in a unique selection of nonfiction books, illustrated books, concept books, (novelty) multicultural and foreign language picturebooks. Throughout the last years I have recognized a greater variety of picturebooks showing foreign languages and cultures as kindergarten groups have become more diverse in the Lower Austrian countryside. However, in my personal experience, those were not always suitable mainly due to language level or too complex storylines. A clear distinction between foreign and second language learning is necessary here since demands towards literature are not the same. As the focus is on the former, the latter will not be discussed in more detail. I frequently encountered *The Gruffalo* by Donaldson and Scheffler, for example. The original version is aimed at native speakers; it is a rather long story written in complex language. EFL learners were overwhelmed by the English picturebook and mostly lacked the patience to read the book to the end. They could hardly follow the storyline and the choice of target vocabulary was challenging as such a great abundance of words was offered but hardly any of them were repeated or highlighted. The book did not provide many opportunities to involve the readers; hardly any of the aforementioned strategies could be employed. Therefore, *The Gruffalo Touch and Feel Book* was introduced in the lessons, which proved to be more appropriate, as described in chapter 5.3.1.3.

Another approach could be “The Family Backpack Project” introduced by Rowe and Fain. They initiated a home book reading program where families were provided with multilingual or foreign language picturebooks, supplemented with audio recordings. One of the goals was the support of children of low-income families by providing them access to picturebooks and recordings in EFL or other foreign languages, and their L1 alike. The families were again asked to keep a journal, which was supposed to reflect their utilization and interpretation of the material. No clear instructions were given in order to increase creativity. Families produced drawings or writings in English or their L1, for example. The backpack included two picturebooks, one being read in kindergarten and one providing supplementary stories, CD recordings of the book and in the various other L1s of the children in the group, a CD player, a blank family response journal, writing material, translated instructions and an inventory list (405).

Overall, 249 children were involved in the study, each taking a backpack home three times over the course of five months. Responses were collected from the parents via the journal entries and a short survey. Overall, results were overwhelmingly positive, especially those from families who had utilized the dual-language material as it provided new opportunities (407f). Rowe and Fain emphasized the children's active participation in book-reading (413) and two-way sharing of texts, meaning that picturebooks could be provided by teachers for families but also vice versa. Parents had the chance to "express and display their own interests, interactions, and literacy practices" through the journal (414).

The idea of the Family Backpack can be adjusted to the needs of young EFL learners in Austrian kindergartens. In my experience, many parents are insecure about their own English skills, especially their pronunciation; therefore, they are reluctant of speaking English with their children. Such a backpack could be a handy and valuable tool for many families. Considering choice of literature, criteria is provided in chapter 6. Supplementary material, like songs, games, flashcards or hand puppets, should be provided for each book. Thus, children would be familiarized with the new vocabulary in a variety of ways and productive language skills would be promoted as well. This requires research and creativity on the side of the teacher as extra material is certainly not available for every book, which means that the teachers themselves have to provide some. Audiobooks or recorded readings are a vital part of the backpack and can be provided on a CD, USB stick or in a cloud online. The learners can listen to those recordings together with their families or on their own and, following that, the parents themselves might become more secure in their English reading and pronunciation skills through the regular listening practice as well. They might also simply copy pronunciation, stress and intonation from the audios. This can increase their self-confidence as EFL speakers, which might motivate them to further integrate the English language into their daily routines. Therefore, the Family Backpack might cause a snowball effect, increasing the children's, and possibly even the parents', English skills in a variety of ways. Learning opportunities are provided for all children equally, no matter their L1, culture or financial situation. The project does depend on the parents' motivation to a certain extent though, as their support is essential for its success. If they do not support their children and fail to take the time for the shared readings, additional tasks and the journal response, the children cannot fully benefit

from the backpack. However, in the original project this was not an issue and it can be assumed that the vast majority of parents will support their young learners.

## 6. Selection Criteria

The following criteria has been established to support the development of young learners' linguistic competence in foreign languages, with a focus on the English language. It is aimed at supporting teachers of Lower Austrian kindergartens in their picturebook choice for EFL or multilingual education. Furthermore, open libraries or family backpacks, as described before, can be equipped according to these criteria. The focus on English derives from its status as lingua franca and media language; additionally, increased promotion by the state, curriculum and also the parents are an issue. As described in chapter 3.3, English native speakers used to be paid by the state to teach English in Lower Austrian kindergartens. Although some kindergartens also offer additional foreign language lessons, typically of neighboring countries like Czech, no other language is taught over a wide area. Although native speakers do not teach in elementary education anymore, the focus on English has not shifted but rather intensified. While English natives did not have to follow a curriculum and were free in their lesson planning, educators are now expected to include English in their daily routines. Moreover, parents expect their children to acquire some basic English language skills "to be prepared for school", as they frequently call it. The common opinion of parents appears to be that children should learn "as much as possible" in kindergarten to facilitate their later school career. This view is challenging and not necessarily supported by teachers. Nevertheless, they are expected to include English, languages of neighboring countries and learner's first languages in their daily program (Charlotte Bühler Institut, *Curriculum Lower Austria* 23). As EFL and multilingual picturebooks are a valuable source to support language learning, teachers require criteria for their selection. The following suggestions are geared to the needs of young EFL beginners and aim at providing optimal reading experiences and learning outcomes alike. However, not each book needs to fulfill all the criteria, instead I argue that all these suggestions should be reflected somewhere in the book selection available in the group.

## **6.1. Complexity of Story and Text Length**

Story complexity is a primary selection criterion if young EFL beginners are involved as their prior English language knowledge is extremely low. Picturebooks aimed at native speakers often involve complex syntax and advanced vocabulary. Furthermore, the story can consist of multiple plotlines which can confuse the young learners. Collins, who researched “ELL Preschoolers’ English Vocabulary Acquisition from Storybook Reading”, referred to book reviews and only considered picturebooks which were considered appropriate for preschoolers. This classification mainly relied on complexity of the stories and age-appropriate length of the text (88). No definition is provided for “age-appropriate”; however, defining that will not be a challenge for kindergarten teachers as they possess the relevant background knowledge from L1 book choice. Text length also depends on the story and, accordingly, the language. On the one hand, a text can be rather long but involve basic vocabulary and many repetitions, hence, it does not overwhelm its readers. On the other hand, a text can be short but involve advanced vocabulary and a complex storyline, which might overwhelm young EFL learners. Therefore, no specific word count is provided here. The teacher should consider whether the picturebook can be finished in one sitting. If more than one sitting is required, these will supposedly occur on different days, thus, the book should be subdivided appropriately. Considering complexity of a story, teachers might also consult book reviews if in doubt about its suitability for young EFL beginners. They provide evaluations, and possibly previous experience made by fellow teachers.

Austrian kindergartners are between two and a half and five years of age, which is a broad range considering their developmental status. An additional challenge is the fact that the five-year-olds have already learned English for up to three years; therefore, their English language knowledge is fairly advanced compared to the youngest learners. Hence, each group is even more heterogeneous than a school class, which is a major challenge for picturebook choice. However, not all books available in the group need to be suitable for each child. The teacher can subcategorize further and provide suitable English picturebooks for all learners. They can also teach English in smaller groups from time to time throughout the year to cater for all children’s needs. Another approach I experienced was English picturebook readings across all groups in one

house. One teacher approached all five-year-old preschoolers and invited them to join her in another room, where she would focus on the interest and needs of this group. This allowed her to introduce more complex storylines and longer texts as all children had some background vocabulary knowledge to draw on. Summing up, complexity of the story and text length depend on a variety of factors, and include language complexity, age and prior English vocabulary knowledge. Furthermore, the teacher's intention considering implementation of the picturebook and reading-aloud are relevant.

## **6.2. Reader Involvement**

As discussed at length in chapter 5, reader involvement plays a crucial role in language acquisition from picturebooks. Children can be engaged to actively participate in the read-aloud through dramatizing, TPR, characterization or talking back, for example. Picturebooks are offered with a variety of added features, like physical elements such as flaps or tabs, sound effects and other interactive features to involve their readers. Overall, children's engagement in the reading process has a positive effect and fosters language learning. However, particularly young learners might be overwhelmed or distracted by an overabundance of physical elements in books, as shown by Tare et al. They argued that "less is more" with readers up to three years of age. Hence, teachers should be particularly cautious while reading picturebooks with physical elements to their youngest learners and carefully watch their reactions.

EFL or multilingual picturebooks can be implemented in elementary education in a variety of ways with numerous ideas for reader involvement. Teachers should consider the book's potential for reader involvement before acquiring it. A book can provide rather straightforward, clear ideas depending on the story, the dialogues, the illustrations and also the topic. As described before, *From Head to Toe* by Eric Carle or *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed* by Eileen Christelow can be valuable resources. In my experience, readers typically started to dramatize, vocalize and characterize the lines without being instructed to do so. The TPR method in connection with the readings further encouraged and motivated participation. This concurs with the curriculum for Lower Austrian kindergartens. Movement and exercise are explicitly described there as learning tools to be implemented in (foreign) language learning



sessions (19). Furthermore, learners should be motivated playfully by sharing rimes or fingerplay (22). Some picturebooks are valuable to realize this approach, as they provide rimes or chants that can be acted as fingerplays. Children are supposed to experience learning with all their senses (22), which leads to physical elements provided in some picturebooks. Materiality is a central aspect for publishers, as interactive books can appeal to all senses. Educators can motivate children to see, hear, feel, smell or even taste the books if according elements and features are provided. One story can be published in different formats including a variety of interactive features and manipulative elements, as shown with the example of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle (see chapter 5).

Hand puppets are an additional, rather common tool in EFL teaching, also suggested in the curriculum (see chapter 2.1). Although a hand puppet is not particularly a part of the picturebook, it can support learner participation during the reading process. Some teachers are extremely successful with this method; they adjust their voice, pitch and volume according to the character and situation in the book. The hand puppet does typically not understand anything not uttered in English, which is a smart and effective way of involving children. Some picturebooks provide suitable hand puppets, otherwise, they might be crafted by the children before the shared reading. Hence, if a teacher appreciates appertaining hand puppets to involve the readers, their availability might be a selection criterion.

### **6.3. Multilingualism**

Multilingual picturebooks are a valuable resource for language teaching, particularly for young learners. The fact that in most kindergarten groups a variety of first languages are spoken, is a challenge for teachers. They can hardly spend enough time with each child to individually support their language development on a regular basis. Nevertheless, teachers are asked to use and foster all the linguistic resources available in their groups (see chapter 2). Multilingual picturebooks are one way of introducing and fostering a variety of languages in a shared read-aloud with a group of children. The teacher does not have to speak or understand all the languages in the books, as this is an opportunity to involve the parents. Considering selection of books as well as read-alouds, the parents should be involved for three reasons. First, quality of

translations and appropriate representation of other cultures can be ensured (Rowe and Fain 404). Second, integration of a variety of first languages spoken by the young learners can be fostered (Rowe and Fain 404). Third, the involvement of parents might motivate them to continue or repeat the book-readings at home and foster their child's linguistic development further. As described before, multilingual libraries, journal responses, or a family backpack are ideas to encourage home-readings (see chapter 5.4).

The following criteria should be considered for multilingual picturebook selection:

- Organization and layout of languages (Hélot 55-58),
- Translation concerns (Rowe and Fain 404; Hélot 47; Hadaway and Young 262),
- Portrayal of foreign or minority languages and cultures (Kümmerling-Meibauer "Code-Switching" 18f; also see chapter 4.3),
- Visual and linguistic codes (Kümmerling-Meibauer "Multilingualism and Children's Literature" viii; also see chapter 4.2), and
- Scripts and reading-direction (Hélot 55; Hadaway and Young 263).

The following three multilingual picturebooks are suitable examples for the Austrian elementary setting: *Der Erste Schultag. The First Day at School . أول يوم في المدرسة* by Can Ekin Arslan et al., *Das Kleine Ich bin Ich. Erzählt in 3 Sprachen: Deutsch, Arabisch, Farsi* by Mira Lobe and Susi Weigel, and *Happy* by Mies Van Hout. *Der Erste Schultag. The First Day at School . أول يوم في المدرسة* is a "Junior Company" project by HTL-Ungargasse, an Austrian upper secondary school. Students developed the idea of producing a trilingual children's book so support refugee children. Their intention was the facilitation of the learners' German language acquisition in a playful manner, and they highlighted the role of communication to learn from each other (Arslan et al. 3). Ali's first day at school is described, in text on the left side and in visual illustrations on the right side of each doublespread. The languages are always presented in the same order, first German, followed by English and Arabic. Therefore, it can be assumed that German is the original text, while English and Arabic are translations (Hélot 55). The text is complete in all three languages, translations are rather close; however, they are not always literal, like "dürfen natürlich auch nicht fehlen" is translated to "are also a must" (p8). While the teacher is described as a blond woman, she is depicted with grey hair (p10-11). These are minor variances that can

be addressed by the teacher while reading the book. Considering Ali's language and culture, not much information is provided. Ali's father is presented as an active, caring parent who holds his hand and soothes his nerves. As described in chapter 4.3.1, there is a lack of male characters presented in a traditional feminine gender role acting in a non-gender normative way. Therefore, this multilingual picturebook is a valuable resource in (Austrian) elementary education. The teacher, however, is stereotyped. This caring role is depicted as an extremely old-fashioned woman, wearing conservative grey clothes and having her hair arranged in a neat bun (p11). Besides that, *Der Erste Schultag. The First Day at School. أول يوم في المدرسة* shows two children with different cultural backgrounds and different skin colors engaging in the same activity, sharing their first day at school and then even sharing their presents. Similarities are stressed rather than differences (Aronson et al. 167). The only explicit component of Ali's culture is "Lokum", "some oriental fudge" (p22), which the two children share. This picturebook falls into the category "Every Child", as the main character is non-white, but his cultural background is not a defining feature (Aronson et al. 173). A glossary with relevant vocabulary is provided at the end of the book, with 34 pictures and the according words in all three languages. Overall, this multicultural and multilingual picturebook can be implemented in EFL or multilingual sessions alike; furthermore, parents might enjoy reading it together with their children as the topic of the first day of school is particularly relevant for five to six year old kindergartners who are about to start school.

*Das Kleine Ich bin Ich* by Mira Lobe and Susi Weigel is offered in two multilingual versions, one written in German, Arabic, Farsi and the other one written in German, Croatian, Serbian, and Turkish. The anthropomorphized little creature is searching for identity and meets a variety of other anthropomorphized animals on the way. As this picturebook is well-known and widespread in Austrian elementary education, it is not analyzed in detail in this thesis. A great variety of supplementary material is provided, like audio CD's, flash cards or an accompanying literacy project. An instruction to make one's own "Ich-bin-Ich" is provided in the endpapers, which encourages the reader to actively engage in the reading process with their own little stuffed animal. Most of the text is hidden behind large flaps that the reader has to open. Similar to the previous example, *Das Kleine Ich bin Ich* can be implemented in EFL or multilingual lessons.

Moreover, the multilingual picturebook can be included in open libraries or the family backpack to involve the young readers' families.

*Happy* by Mies Van Hout is a nearly-wordless picturebook about emotions (Bland, *Learner Empowerment* 40). Each doublespread consists of an adjective for an emotion and a visual illustration of a fish feeling that way indicated through colors, spacing, locations and mime. Emotions are a relevant issue in the Austrian curriculum and this picturebook is a useful way to incorporate this issue in language education. As the book does not include a complex narrative or advanced vocabulary, it can be implemented with the youngest learners in kindergartens. The children can be involved by guessing or copying the emotions while reading the book, for example.

These three multilingual picturebooks are presented as examples and the short description here are no in-depth analyses.

#### **6.4. Topic / Content**

The choice of appropriate content or a specific topic in the picturebook depends on the teaching and learning aim. As described in chapter 4.1, concept books are supposed to teach certain topics like colors or animals (Graham 211). Although they are not considered picturebooks by Graham, they can be useful for teaching foreign languages to young learners, as they do not need to comprehend complex storylines and no previous vocabulary knowledge is assumed. One example is *Happy* by Mies Van Hout, as described in the previous chapter. Overall, the picturebook content should be age-appropriate and in accordance with the children's environments and experiences (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, Chapter 2). Furthermore, overarching kindergarten projects should be considered, as well as seasonal topics and individual interests as described in chapter 5.2. The teacher needs to consciously choose target vocabulary to be acquired by the learners, besides incidentally learning words (see chapter 5.2). This choice can and should influence the selection of picturebooks. The following books were used in my teaching and proved to be successful tools to teach certain topic areas:

- Adjectives: *Opposites* by Sandra Boynton

- Animals and the verb “hear”: *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You Hear?* by Bill Martin Jr and Eric Carle
- Animals and the verb “see”: *Panda Bear, Panda Bear, What Do You See?* by Bill Martin Jr and Eric Carle
- Body parts: *Horns to Toes and in Between* by Sandra Boynton
- Clothes: *Froggy gets Dressed* by Jonathan London and Frank Remkiewicz
- Colors and Animals: *A Color of His Own* by Leo Lionni
- Family members: *So Much!* by Trish Cooke and Helen Oxenbury
- Moods and Animals: *Happy Hippo, Angry Duck. A Book of Moods* by Sandra Boynton
- Personal characteristics: *Little Humans* by Brandon Stanton

## 6.5. Diversity

The collection of picturebooks available in elementary education should always be an authentic reflection of cultural diversity (Bland *Diversity*). As described in the previous chapters, the curriculum clearly expects teachers to foster positive attitude towards heterogeneity and diversity (see chapters 2 and 4.3). The absence of stereotypes is not sufficient, instead cultural values and accuracy of details in text and visual illustrations is necessary (Yoo-Lee et al. 326). Some groups of people are particularly marginalized in education and underrepresented in picturebooks (see chapter 4.3); therefore, teachers should ensure authentic representation by involving insiders of the respective culture or group of people. The roles and representation of the following groups should be examined carefully: women, fathers, a variety of ethnicities and cultures including minority groups, black girls, refugees, children with disabilities and poverty-stricken people (see chapter 4.3). This list is certainly not exhaustive; it is merely a collection of the most underrepresented groups, as described in chapter 4.3. In general, each child should have at least one picturebook acting as a mirror book, no matter their cultural background, ethnicity, religion, class or physical constraint. All the young language learners should be provided with a large variety of window books that provide an insight into many different lives to foster open-mindedness and positive attitude towards other people. However, they should also be made aware of the fact that one single book cannot reflect the heterogeneity of any group of people to its full extent (Yoo-Lee 342).

The provision of picturebook examples reflecting diversity is challenging as the field is so broad; the following are merely examples and do not reflect all underrepresented groups of people described before. The aforementioned *Little Humans* by Brandon Stanton, *So Much!* by Trish Cooke and Helen Oxenbury, *Le Voyage de Mao-Mi (Encore Une Fois)* by Mansot, Yifu and Bresner and *Subway Sparrow* by Leyla Torres show a certain degree of diversity and can easily be implemented in Austrian kindergartens. The characters are of diverse cultural background in all books; nevertheless, *Little Humans* and *So Much!* could easily be staged in Austria as well. In comparison, *Handa's Surprise* by Eileen Browne presents a black girl from the Luo tribe in south-west Kenya. She walks to her friend with a fruit basket on her head, wondering which of the fruits her friend will like best. Meanwhile, the pictures show African wild animals helping themselves to her presents one by one, and eventually she arrives with tangerines that have fallen off a tree. The text is rather simple and a big part of the story is told via the pictures. The reader gains insight into a Kenyan girl's everyday life. Local animals, landscapes, tropical fruits and a Luo village are depicted, which shows the reader another reality of life. An example for an LGBTQ picturebook is *Mommy, Mama, and Me* by Leslea Newman and Carol Thompson. This rhyming story shows and describes two homosexual mothers caring for their toddler; each page provides one sentence like "Mommy picks me up up up." or "Mama pours juice in my cup.". *Daddies and Baddies* by Mat Waugh and Graham Evans is a recently published picturebook showing five fathers with their children, and five villains. The active fathers and their children are of diverse ethnic background and work together to fight the robbers. One girl sits in a wheelchair and fights one of them too. Two out of the five gangsters are females. One drawback are the rhyming texts, which are rather advanced. Overall, the author and illustrator depict unbiased gender roles and a diversity of characters.

## 6.6. Pragmatic Considerations

Some pragmatic considerations considering picturebook selection for multilingual and EFL teaching are sources of books, availability and supplementary material. There is no perfect source where appropriate multilingual or EFL picturebooks for young language learners are introduced and frequently updated, which is one of the reasons

for the research in this thesis. Kindergarten teachers need to be competent considering the suitability of books for their group of children; therefore, these criteria are provided. Most of the picturebooks mentioned in this paper are available in Austria, which is one of the reasons for their involvement. On the one hand, there are some bookshops in Vienna focusing on foreign language literature, including picturebooks that can be consulted; on the other hand, there are some bookshops focusing on children's literature, including foreign language picturebooks. The range of books is considerably broader in online bookshops; however, the suitability for Austrian elementary education is not ensured. Besides the availability of the picturebooks themselves, teachers might consider the availability of supplementary material like hand puppets, flash cards, games, coloring books, riddles, songs or apps. Although pre- and post-reading tasks or games can foster language learning, a great variety of additional material is not always needed. While-reading activities as described in chapter 5.3.1 can also increase motivation, engagement and learning success. Rowe and Fain (413) suggested the following websites as resources for appropriate books for young multilingual learners: [www.ibby.org](http://www.ibby.org) and <http://wowlit.org/> (among others). The International Board on Books for Young People (ibby) also offers a virtual collection for European children's books (<https://www.ibby-europe.org/Books>). These websites provide picturebooks in a variety of languages, however, multilingual ones are not available. Therefore, they are useful resources for EFL lessons or if picturebooks in specific (minority) languages are sought.

## 7. Conclusion

The relevance of foreign languages has increased in Lower Austrian elementary education over the last decades. Kindergarten teachers are expected to support early second/foreign language acquisition as well as first language learning. A child whose L1 is Spanish, for example, requires support with L2 German and EFL; however, Spanish should also be valued and fostered. In a heterogenous group of children this is a considerable challenge for teachers. In this thesis it has been argued that picturebooks are a valuable resource to support all young learners as they can either serve as window books or mirror books. Teachers can implement multilingual and EFL picturebooks to introduce a variety of languages, countries and cultures, as required by the Lower Austrian curriculum (Charlotte Bühler Institut, *Curriculum Lower Austria* 23). Furthermore, a positive attitude towards diversity of languages and cultures can be facilitated (24). The role of cultural knowledge on the side of the reader has been described, as particularly the visual illustrations require familiarity with cultural signs, symbols and codes. Young readers might not yet be familiar with them; therefore, the teacher is needed as a mediator between picturebook and reader. Next, the role of diversity has been discussed, with an increased focus on languages, cultures, gender roles and race of the depicted characters. Picturebooks are didactic tools that can support their readers to become broad-minded human beings; thus, the accurate representation of the aforementioned qualities is of profound significance. Children are supposed to learn English or other foreign languages from the picturebook readings; therefore, vocabulary acquisition has been discussed in the next chapter. Incidental language learning can be fostered via readings; nevertheless, it has been argued that the teacher should choose target words to foster vocabulary learning. Furthermore, the involvement of the learners' families has been emphasized in order to assist linguistic development.

Finally, the following criteria for the selection of appropriate EFL or multilingual picturebooks has been proposed: complexity of story and text length, reader involvement, multilingualism, topic/content, diversity, and pragmatic considerations. These criteria raise no claim to completeness; instead, they are suggestions to support Lower Austrian kindergarten teachers in their choice of appropriate picturebooks for their heterogenous, yet unique group of young learners. The curricula provided by the



government of Austria and the state of Lower Austria, as well as EU policy have been considered. The picturebooks presented and/or analyzed are examples that have proven successful in practice to the effect that learners acquired pronunciation, intonation and new vocabulary on the one hand; and enjoyed the read-alouds, topic/content and involvement on the other hand. Overall, teachers have to be fluent English language speakers themselves, furthermore, they need to be competent in EFL and multilingual education to facilitate foreign language learning in their learners. They also need to be aware that no one book has to fully meet all the requirements discussed; they should rather be considered a basis, and conscious choices need to be made. Each child should have access to a great variety of appropriate EFL and multilingual picturebooks.

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## **Abstract**

In this thesis criteria for EFL and multilingual picturebook selection for Austrian elementary education is suggested. A vast variety of picturebooks is published each year, the great majority of which aims at native speakers of the respective language. However, the demands of foreign language learners vary from those of native speakers, hence, many of those books are not appropriate language learning tools. Kindergarten teachers require criteria to choose suitable picturebooks in various languages. The basis for the suggested guidelines are the curricula provided by the government, as well as previous studies on multilingualism, picturebook theory and vocabulary acquisition. The following criteria are suggested to foster / support language learning: complexity of story and text length, reader involvement, multilingualism, topic/content, diversity and pragmatic considerations.

## **Zusammenfassung**

In dieser Diplomarbeit werden Kriterien zur Auswahl passender Bilderbücher für den Fremdsprachenunterricht in österreichischen Kindergärten vorgeschlagen, sowohl für Englisch, als auch für mehrsprachigen Unterricht. Eine Vielzahl an Bilderbüchern wird jährlich veröffentlicht, die Zielgruppe sind fast ausschließlich MuttersprachlerInnen der jeweiligen Sprache, diese haben jedoch andere Anforderungen als FremdsprachenlernerInnen. Daher haben KindergartenpädagogInnen Bedarf an Richtlinien und Kriterien, anhand derer adäquate Bilderbücher ausgewählt werden können, die Grundlage dafür sind der Bildungsrahmenplan des Staates Österreich und der Bildungsplan des Landes Niederösterreich. Weiters wurden Studien aus den Bereichen Mehrsprachigkeit, Bilderbuchtheorie und Vokabelerwerb berücksichtigt. Die folgenden Kriterien sind relevant: Komplexität der Erzählung und Textlänge, Involvierung der Lesenden, Mehrsprachigkeit, Thema bzw. Inhalt, Diversität und pragmatische Überlegungen.