

## **6 Testing different text genres in linguistic minority students within the Bremer Förderprojekt: how should “stylistic aspects” be assessed?**

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### Introduction

Testing (foreign) language knowledge is a common procedure in order to estimate a speaker's or student's ability, given that a qualification in more than three languages (at least one native and two foreign ones) is expected in all countries in Europe (cf. the recommendations made by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). However, none of the linguistic evaluations currently in use is appropriate for long-term considerations but is designed to test current output in highly decontextualized settings. It is therefore admissible to question whether the results really reflect what speakers know or if they just reproduce ad hoc knowledge. Turning to content, many assessments of second language learners of German concentrate on communication skills, whereas several references point out that most students easily cope with informal oral communication but have serious problems mastering literacy-related skills required in academic contexts. In other words, they fail in writing, in understanding complex text structures, and in reading comprehension. Along these lines, there is a need to design new evaluation methods that are capable of capturing deep-rooted competencies test-persons are eventually (and hopefully) versed in retrieving. Following Dirks (2009), the goal is to estimate outcomes of the established state of proficiencies linked to the orientational knowledge (Bildungswissen) and not only to the formative knowledge (Ausbildungswissen).

In the present article, a new diagnostic instrument tested in a project supporting language minority secondary level (Sekundarstufe I) students, the Bremer Förderprojekt für Kinder und Jugendliche mit Migrationshintergrund, is presented.<sup>1</sup> We design and conduct an assessment which focuses on both the grammatical correctness of written language production and genre-specific writing styles required in the class-room. The basic goal of the test is to (1) measure the linguistic skills to date and/or learning progress of the students, not in the sense of screening and evaluating them as “good” or “not good enough”, but in order to allow an

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individual support for each student. According to this, the assessment tries to detect experienced knowledge expected and adopted in school settings.

A further outcome of designing a test on written language production addresses question (2), concerning which literacy-related skills students need in order to perform well. Once the techniques needed for writing texts appropriate to school contexts are identified, the following question is (3), how written texts can be measured in a test. Finally, an important outcome is to find out (4), how students can be supported in order to achieve these skills. I will discuss these topics focussing on (2) and (3) and illustrate my viewpoint in the light of the seminal debate on how to test literacy skills.

## 1 Testing language skills

Testing German as a second language (L2) proficiency in language minority children and students has become more and more en vogue, given that everyone – educationalists, teachers, linguists, psychologists etc. – seeks to upgrade the bad results these students achieved in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (cf. e.g. Prenzel et al., 2004). The poor performance is presumably due to the students' insufficient control of German.

Interestingly, most of the evaluations currently conducted concern nurseries and elementary schools and test language proficiency in oral communication (for a critical review of some studies, cf. Ehlich, 2007; Roth, 2008), but virtually no test is attested for secondary level, the level tested in PISA. This is remarkable for at least two reasons.

Firstly, it is unclear why language assessments operate during normal language acquisition phases and not later, by the time it is explicit whether a person is a L1 or L2 speaker. Lots of students are categorized as second language learners only based on the fact that they have a so called migration background – as if this automatically means to be an L2 speaker of a language – without checking since when they have systematically been in contact with the German language. Several recent studies attest in fact that language development in children who receive orderly input in German at age three is very similar to first language acquisition development (cf. Tracy, 2007; Rothweiler, 2008). Thus, the legitimate question arises why children with certain first languages are promptly considered L2-learners of German whereas others with more popular and less stigmatized languages, e.g. English or French, are regarded as bilinguals, given that both groups show similar developments (for the development of languages in bilinguals, cf. e.g. Müller, Kupisch, Schmitz & Cantone, 2007, and Cantone, Kupisch, Müller & Schmitz, 2008). Oddly enough, there are several studies on simultaneous bilingual first language acquisition with language pairs like German/English, German/Spanish, German/Italian, German/French etc., but almost no longitudinal study including German/Turkish, German/Russian or German/Arabic, as if it was not linguistically and practically possible to become bilingual in circumstances including the latter language pairs. Early L2-learners of German could at least be considered

as learners of German as an additional language (to their first language) or even as successive bilinguals.

Secondly, language minority students do not collapse in oral communication but mostly in written composition when resolving complex writing assignments. Hence, assessment tests should concentrate on schoolchildren's written performances in primary and secondary school, and not only in oral communication in nursery or primary schools. Particularly, test designs should try to capture whatever is needed to master academic content and not just conversational skills. I'll address the definition of what kind of register we are speaking of in the next section.

Finally, mastering academic language is not only a problem for language minority students. Thus, researchers should not only dedicate their efforts to designing tests for second language learners, in particular if the students we are talking about are not per se second language learners. Instead, the goal should be to support students with particular needs and not to stigmatize whole language groups, as pointed out in MacSwan (2000). It is therefore worth looking at whether second language learners' problems differ from monolinguals' ones in part or totally.

In the next section, I define what literacy-related skills students need in order to perform well and briefly discuss how to measure written texts, presenting proposals made by studies on written language performance.

## 2 Testing specific schooling-relevant skills

Already in the late 1970s, it was clear that the set of problems linguistic minorities face is not located within colloquial speech but in the domain of a specific language register particularly important in school settings. Cummins (1979) proposed to call these two different language registers basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS), the language children know at the end of approximate first language acquisition (age 5), and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), the academically oriented language of literacy and schooling. Lately, Cummins has defined CALP (or academic language) as a cognitively demanding register in a context reduced setting (Cummins, 2000, p. 68). BICS appears the register to be acquired, which takes L2 speakers up to 2 years, whereas CALP, being the register needed in school, takes 5 to 7 years to be acquired.<sup>2</sup> The features which distinguish CALP from BICS are e.g. being able to formulate complex grammatical structures, having a wider range of vocabulary, and disposing of certain cognitive processes (Cummins, 2000).

Following Cummins, Gogolin (e.g. 1994; 2006) proposes to call the specific language register needed in educational settings *Bildungssprache*, the language of

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<sup>2</sup> Cummins himself argues against seeing CALP as a superior register to BICS; however, given his own position as regards the acquisition of these two variants, it seems a logical consequence to assume this sequence (cf. also the critique in MacSwan & Rolstad, 2003; 2008).

education. This term seems not to be in accordance with Habermas (1977), who saw *Bildungssprache* (elaborated code) as an interaction of *Umgangssprache* (colloquial speech) and *Wissensprache* (technical/scientific code), because, following Habermas, the elaborated code is also necessary in everyday life. Nowadays, *Bildungssprache* is just seen as the specific language register needed in school settings. Nonetheless, since including the term *Bildung* (education), this concept could be misinterpreted as elitist, a level only some speaker with special requirements might reach and a language register certainly difficult for language minority speakers (cf. the discussion in Rolstad, 2005). Thus, bilinguals' competences are seen as inferior to monolinguals (as discussed in MacSwan, 2000; 2005). Lately (but also used in Gogolin), a term often found is *schulbezogene Sprache*, school-related language (e.g. Eckhardt, 2008). In comparing results on this specific language register, it has often been claimed that technical language is particularly difficult to learn for language minority students without stating what exactly this register is made of.

As a matter of fact, although researchers such as Cummins do not explicitly differentiate between oral and written proficiency, it has become clear by looking at several studies that the specific problems language minority students have to face lie in the domain of written language. Given that knowing how to use written language is essential for success in school contexts, this might explain poor results in school assessment despite of reasonable command of oral communication in everyday life. Furthermore, even oral communication in school settings bears more resemblance to written language rather than to everyday life communication. Learning to use written language is an additional type of language acquisition for all students, monolinguals and bilinguals alike.

In order to avoid the shortcomings of the BICS/CALP dichotomy, we decided to replace the term academic language by calling the specific written language register we look at *Schuldeutsch*, school language (Cantone & Haberzettl, 2008; 2009; cf. next section). In doing so, we focus on the variety of genres learners need in class. Agreeing that there is a specific kind of language required in school, but dissenting that it is linked to cognitive proficiency and to first language acquisition, MacSwan & Rolstad (2003) propose second language instructional competence (SLIC), a language variety needed in order to be able to master subject matters in the L2. Similar to SLIC, we are only interested in detecting the stage of L2 acquisition in order to be able to give recommendations for supporting lessons.

Now, given that mastering written language plays a key role for success in educational settings, how can this specific language register, and particularly conceptual-literate skills, be measured? What belongs to it and what forms it? Surely, written language demands specific challenges; for example, it has no concrete addressee (as e.g. in argumentative texts), it is reflected and planned, and it requires a restructuring of linguistic knowledge (as discussed in e.g. Feilke, 2006).

The C-Test, a test for measuring language proficiency consisting of a text with half-deleted words, has been proposed to be a good indicator of academic language (cf.

e.g. Grotjahn & Tönshoff, 1992; Daller, 1996; Eckhardt, 2008), for it particularly tests context reduced and literacy-linked competencies, all proposed to be key criteria for an academic register. Along these lines, creating a C-Test based on e.g. newspaper articles could check everyday language, whereas a test based on text books assesses academic language proficiency, according to the BICS/CALP distinction (Daller, 1996).

The Zürcher Textanalysenraster, an assessment for high-school graduates and college students (cf. e.g. Nussbaumer & Sieber, 1994; Sieber, 2008), states that a “good text” includes factors such as covering text characteristics, formal correctness (including orthography) as well as functional adequacy (coherence, comprehensibility), aesthetic adequacy (particular formal qualities), and finally content relevance (specific content qualities) in order to evaluate a text’s quality (Sieber, 2008, p. 273).

Neumann (2007) analyzes letters of objection by evaluating single text features like the composition (including well placed originator address, calendar date, subject heading, salutation), the content required in the task, orthography, grammar, and style (adequate to the genre business letter, formal/politely mode, diversified phrases).<sup>3</sup>

Recently, Eckhardt (2008) tested whether language minority children in elementary school show different results (a) than monolingual German children and (b) in performing everyday and academic language orally and in written form. The written language was tested by adapting different text types (some dealing with everyday life topics, others taken from textbooks) as a C-Test. Interestingly, the results revealed that schoolchildren indeed perform better with everyday life texts than with those taken from text-books, hence being more conceptual-literate, corroborating claim (b), but there was no meaningful difference between monolingual and language minority children, thus disconfirming (a). Eckhardt (2008) assumes that differences in mastering school related language and academic texts do not show up in elementary school, since the language used in school does not yet differ very much from everyday language. Thus, she advocates for similar studies in secondary level in order to examine whether there are achievement differences between language minority students and monolingual ones, as has often been claimed. Furthermore, she pleads research into when exactly academic language starts to play a role in school life.

In sum, there are several factors which belong to the specific register needed in school in order to master instructional tasks and to be able to follow class discussion; however, this variety of language is a context-sensitive variant of language, i.e., conditioned by the school setting (see SLIC), rather than a superior grade of language (academic language) only available to few people. We must be aware of the fact that in allocating academic language a higher status than

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<sup>3</sup> Neumann (2007) has an extensive appendix including a coding-handbook and several text examples.

conversational speech, we (1) state that using the former means to be superior and (2) that languages without written forms are less demanding than others, as pointed out in e.g. MacSwan & Rolstad (2003). In order to test the specific language needed in school, we need instruments that particularly focus on this technical variety of language, for example, tasks or text genres that are also used in school settings.

In the next section the new language assessment test used at Bremen University is presented.

### 3 The diagnostic instrument Schuldeutsch<sup>4</sup>

For the last three years, language minority students have been supported through the Bremer Förderprojekt für Kinder und Jugendliche mit Migrationshintergrund. The participants are partially short-time second language learners of German,<sup>5</sup> but the majority are included in the category of so called Bildungsinländer (second generation migrants who received a German education, mostly being born in Germany), namely approx. 60%.<sup>6</sup> Smaller groups of up to five adolescents get free lessons in different school subjects. The courses are given by undergraduates (prospective teachers) at the university campus. The idea of the project is to help students to improve their marks in certain subjects and to let the groups meet at university in order to provide a learning setting out of school, where negative experiences made in class could affect the supporting lessons, and to reduce fears concerning the campus. As a matter of fact, out of all students who pass through the project (at present 349), 9% have attended Hauptschule (secondary modern school), 17% attended Realschule (secondary technical school) and 39% are Gymnasium students (upper secondary school, grammar school). These data demonstrate how important it is even for upper secondary school students to get support in order to maintain and/or upgrade their marks. It furthermore corroborates the point made in Section 1, namely that many language minority students do not need language exercises but direct support in literacy-related skills in order to master school context.

Alongside the remedial teaching, we developed a diagnostic instrument, the Deutsch für Sekundarstufe I – Schuldeutsch (for more information, cf. Cantone & Haberzettl, 2008; 2009). The purpose of this test is to measure specific language skills in German and to identify the special needs concerning the development of Schuldeutsch, the language needed in instructional contexts. We believe that the

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<sup>5</sup> Out of all students, 5% were 15-18 years old when migrating to Germany (hence, they have lived here approx. 1-2 years), 14% were 11-14 years old. Others, who migrated at age 1-3, are considered successive bilinguals.

<sup>6</sup> These students could be viewed as successive bilinguals (see Section 1).

language used in school context (in oral and written form) is more complex than everyday life language at secondary level and thus might cause problems to whom is not able to use it and work with it.

The assessment concentrates on both the grammatical correctness of written language production and the writing styles required in school. Similar to SLIC (MacSwan & Rolstad, 2003; 2008), we are only interested in assessing specific competencies in the use of second language in specific settings and not in testing general language competencies. Moreover, we do not agree to the assumptions about the cognitive competence of multilinguals implied in the BICS/CALP distinction.

Schuldeutsch consists of three tasks, each covering different genre-specific writing styles. The topics are a formal letter, an argumentative text and a report. These genres are in accordance with school curricula and linked to the students' environment. Text production at the secondary level includes addressee-oriented tasks, as e.g. letters of application, private letters, narrations, descriptions, argumentative texts, and also self-centered texts, like interpretations, characterizations, and alienations (cf. Neumann, 2007, p. 43–45). Along these lines, Neumann (2007, p. 45) proposes expected developmental stage for average 14 years old students. Accordingly, they should be able to orient themselves with the different text genres.

The Schuldeutsch instrument also comprises a detailed evaluation system in order to allow a quantitative analysis. For this purpose, we identified three different domains:

- (a) requirements concerning the task's content (potentially 8 points=100%)
- (b) grammatical/morpho-syntactic skills (correctness 100%)
- (c) stylistic adequacy/conceptual-literal skills (8 points feasible= 100%)

The three tasks letter, argumentative text and report have already been tested separately (each taking 10-15 minutes), but the idea is to use them at the same time in the sense of a superordinate test which better mirrors the students' abilities in different settings and thus better assess the quality of their written texts.<sup>7</sup> Applying different tasks helps to balance the single format's standard/ distinctive requirements (cf. among others Adamzik, 2008, and Janich, 2008). Particularly, we seek to grasp conceptual-literal skills, i.e., the ability to handle different varieties of language (language of immediacy/language of distance, following Koch & Oesterreicher, e.g. 1985; 2008), and to know about text genres.

In the following, I will present some data analyzed within the project.

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<sup>7</sup> All three tasks have been consecutively answered by a pilot group; the results, however, are not available yet. Along to each text, we also design a parallel task for the purpose of assessing learning progresses and for testing reliability.

## 4 Measuring instructional tasks

In order to demonstrate of how we evaluated the texts, I present the analysis of two tasks in the ensuing subsections, the formal letter and the argumentative text, by discussing some data collected within our project (for a quantitative analysis cf. Cantone & Haberzettl, 2008; 2009).

### 4.1 The Briefaufgabe

The first task piloted on the project participants in Bremen was the ensuing formal letter (for the original version, please cf. the appendix):

For the last two years you have visited a sports club (e.g. volleyball, soccer, cheerleading). Now you must stop going there. You are not able to personally talk to your trainer any more and you must write a letter in order to resign from the club. The trainer is a very nice person, and you also have a lot of respect for him.<sup>8</sup>

In your letter you should absolutely express the following:

Regret about leaving the team

Justification: lack of time e.g. because of the final examinations, lots of homework, attendance to supporting lessons

Gratitude<sup>9</sup>

As discussed above, letters (of application, of objection, private and formal ones) are objects of interest in all types of secondary schools. Therefore, we expected the students to know how to master this task, or at least to know how to fulfil the requirements of writing a letter.

In the following, I present two examples.<sup>10</sup> Letter number 12 was written by a 14 year old boy who attends a kind of comprehensive school (9th grade) and was born in Germany (his other language is Turkish); letter number 23 is by a 14 year old girl also born in Germany (and also speaks Farsi) who attends 9th grade at the Gymnasium.

Letter No. 12<sup>11</sup>

Hi Markus,

How are you? You certainly wonder why I am writing you a letter. The reason is, at the moment I have few time for myself and I have a lack of time, because I must

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<sup>8</sup> In the first version of the letter we pointed out that the writer was on first-name terms with the trainer (duzen), but later we asked the students to address the trainer formally (siesen).

<sup>9</sup> In the German version, there are a lot of nominalized forms. Although this leads to a more formal style, we did so in order to make it more difficult for the students to copy parts of the tasks.

<sup>10</sup> The original letters are presented in the appendix.

<sup>11</sup> I tried to translate the letters literally in order to keep them as genuine as possible. Errors are also translated.



prepare myself for the school examinations. Hence I wanted to inform you, that I unfortunately will quit handball. But I will keep on visiting you, as soon as I have time.

Greetings

Letter No. 23

Dear Annett,

Unfortunately I can't say it to you personally, but I have to stop riding! Due to the preparation of my school examination and stress linked with it, I can't come every day to riding anymore. I am dreadfully sorry and I am also very unhappy that you can't be my riding teaching anymore. The riding lessons with you were lots of fun and when I had private sorrows and worries as well, I was able to talk to you about my problems. I will miss all horses and ponies. I hope that we will meet again one day! I will, if I have the time come and visit you! I sincerely thank you for the wonderful hours with you and the horses! Your riding learner

In the first domain, we looked whether the students followed the requirements formulated in the tasks, independently of the quality of the text. The test person had to resign from the club; to demonstrate regret about it; to explain the reason for signing off; and to express her gratitude to the trainer. For each of these content aspects, 0-2 points could be assigned. The boy who composed letter No. 12 got a total of 5 points in this domain: he resigns from the club ("I unfortunately will quit handball", 2 points) and explains why ("I have a lack of time, because I must prepare myself for the school examinations", 2 points), but he just regrets using an adverb ("unfortunately") and not a whole sentence (therefore, 1 point); he did not thank the trainer (0 points). Letter No. 23 in turn got 8 points, as each aspect was exhaustively considered.

In the domain "grammatical/ morpho-syntactic skills" (correctness 100%), we related the number of grammatical errors according to their nature respectively to the number of sentences, verbs and nouns in each text. The proportion of correct to incorrect produced nominal phrases, verbal phrases and sentences results in the percentage of correctness, as we put it in order to avoid the use of the commonly preferred term "error rate". In letter No. 12, for example, we detected no errors at the sentence and verbal phrase levels, but one mistake within the noun domain, namely a wrong case marking on the article, "weil ich mich für der Schulabschluss vorbereiten muss" instead of den (nominative where accusative is required). Since the student produced 9 nouns, we have 97% of correctness in the morpho-syntax domain. Letter No. 23 only has one error, namely the incorrect past participle form *verbindeten* (instead of *verbundenen*), which falls within the verbal domain. Given that the test person produces a total of 15 verbs, the percentage of correctness amounts to 98% (for all kinds of errors counted within the single domains please cf. Cantone & Haberzettl, 2008; 2009).

Finally, the domain of stylistic adequacy/ conceptual-literal skills was analyzed. In this domain, parallel to domain (a), we distinguished four different criteria: general

format (a salutation at the beginning and at the end); adequate connections of the single assertions; adequate vocabulary, that is, no register shifting within one single text; and finally errors concerning the oral-marked use of language (e.g. “ich hab” instead of “ich habe”, “für mein Freund” instead of “für meinen Freund”). According to these criteria, letter No. 23 achieves all 8 points: there is an address, a main text, and a final salutation (2 points); several different complementizers have been used for the purpose of connecting single assertions (e.g. due to, that, if); the vocabulary does not shift (the author addresses her trainer in a personal but respectful way and keeps this form for the whole text); and there is no oral morpho-syntax. In letter No. 12, we have a correct observance of the genre letter (2 points); however, the vocabulary used in the text is not adequate for the purpose and there are only a few complementizers to connect utterances. In total, he reaches 4 points.

In sum, domain (b) has been successfully mastered by the students, whereas the students followed the requirements to a different degree in the domain concerning the task’s requirements. Since we are aware of the fact that it is difficult to be 100% objective in evaluating the domains, we let the texts be scored by two researchers. Currently, the most problematic domain, that is, the one with lower scores, is the one referring to the stylistic demands. This is also reflected in the preliminary analysis.

### The Handyaufgabe

The following argumentative task is concerned with the prohibition of mobiles during schooldays:

Mobile phones are going to be prohibited at your school. Students will thus not be allowed to carry their mobiles to school. Write down whether you agree with this or not and explain why (give at least three arguments).

I again exemplify the analysis by using two exemplars. Letter number 20 was written by a 15 year old boy (born in Germany with Turkish as other language) who attends 9th grade at Gymnasium; the author of letter number 88 is a 13 year old girl who attends 8th grade at Realschule. She was born in Afghanistan and migrated to Germany when she was 1 year old.

#### No. 20

Actually, I am for it, because it is a good thing with respect to the ambience. I can say from my own experience, that the prohibition of mobiles affects positively the ambience. Frequently it was so, that most of the students listened to music or even called next to the classes. There are no fights concerning mobiles any more, who owns the better, nicer or the most functional mobile. Many fights which happened on the school yards have been recorded by students and put on the web. All these enumerations have been abolished by the prohibition.

#### No 88

I am on one hand for it but also against. I am against it, because at our school one needs mobiles. If one comes from a village or there is an emergency. I am for it, because at our school mobiles are often stolen. Mostly during physical education (in the locker room) or also during class. Students don't use their mobiles anyway!!! Maybe only 10% and 90% only to show off. And if they are unlucky it will be stolen.

In domain (a), we again only evaluated requirements concerning the task's content, not the quality of the text. The test person had to name three arguments with identifiable relevance and to sustain an explicit position. We assigned 0-2 points to each requirement. The author of letter No. 20 achieved all 8 points, whereas letter No. 88 scored 4 points. For the first argument ("I am against it, because at our school one needs mobiles. If one comes from a village or there is an emergency") the student received 1 point, because the reader has to think outside the box: one needs mobile because with mobile you can call if you need to be picked up/ you have problems by getting at school if you live outside the city. For the second argument the student achieved 2 points ("I am for it, because at our school mobiles are often stolen. Mostly during physical education (in the locker room) or also during class"). Unfortunately, there is no further argument mentioned. Only one point has been assigned for the position ("I am on one hand for it but also against"), because the test-person does not explicitly mention what she is for or against.

In the domain of grammatical/morpho-syntactic skills, letter No. 88 achieved 100% correctness, whereas in letter No. 20 there is one missing case-marking in „von den Schüler“, instead of „von den Schülern“, resulting in a score of 98%.

In (c), the domain representing stylistic adequacy/conceptual-literal skills the following aspects were assessed: general format (an introduction, a body, and a conclusion), adequate connections of the single assertions, adequate vocabulary indicated through a lack of register shifting within a single text, and, for the sake of testing for a diversified vocabulary, a type-token analysis. In the latter, we looked at types and tokens of nouns and verbs per text and scored 0-1 point for the ratio (the closer to one the better), which thus reflects the variety of words in a single text, and 0-1 point for the absolute number of token in order to recompense long texts.

Text No. 20 received two points for the structure. There is an introduction, a main text and a conclusion; the student makes use of an adequate vocabulary (2 points), and applies different verbs (absolute 14, rate 0,93) and nouns (absolute 20, rate 0,75) in the text, also receiving 2 points in the type-token analysis. For text flow, he achieved 1 point. The author of No. 88 got a total of 3 points in this domain: one point for the format (there is a halfway introduction and a main text, but no conclusion), and 2 points in the type-token analysis (verbs absolute 11/ rate 0,82, nouns absolute 13/rate 0,77).

Summing up, the analysis shows similar results as the letter task. The domain representing grammatical correctness has been mastered by our test-persons, while

domain (a) depended on how accurately the students followed the task requirements. For stylistic adequacy, even the ideal text No. 20 only scored 7 of 8 points.

Overall, our analysis has shown that Schuldeutsch, the variety of language needed in instructional context and tested here in the written form, cannot be evaluated by analyzing morpho-syntactic correctness. Our pre-test indicate that the grammatical requirements have been mastered by all students in the pilot study (cf. Cantone & Haberzettl, 2008; 2009), which makes selectivity impossible. The only domain which seems vulnerable is noun domain, so that we might consider focusing on this area. But, as pointed out in Haberzettl (2009), the analysis of morpho-syntactic correctness could also be excluded from the assessment, for (1) it is a requirement also needed in oral speech and thus not a specification of written composition, and (2) the „complex“ grammar required by conceptual-literal texts (e.g. for referring, for connecting utterances, for marking information structure) is not included in the common morpho-syntactic analysis at the sentence level anyway.

In the ensuing section, I review the implications of the results obtained through Schuldeutsch.

## 5 Discussion: What is assessed in Schuldeutsch?

The ability to write according to text genre requirements is fundamental for performing well in literacy-related skills. Unlike reviewing only one genre as most written production tests do, the assessment Schuldeutsch might better capture the students' proficiencies in at least some aspects of written language. We believe that only this way we can come closer to understanding the nature of school language.

As we have seen in the analysis in Section 4, different text genres require different conceptual-literal skills. Whereas a formal application letter demands a certain format including a formal/politely addressing, an originator address, the subject heading and so forth, a letter sent to a known person as e.g. the trainer, as presented in our data, has to be respectful but not too reserved, it does not need a subject heading, it includes personal motivations and might be narrative, etc. An argumentative composition on the contrary has an impersonalized style and, depending on the topic to be discussed, it can consist of personal motivations or it can comprise professional reasoning. Without fail it requires a subjective but substantive position on an actual issue, in the present case the prohibition of mobiles in schools.<sup>12</sup> Both genres require the use of adequate and variable elements for connecting single assertions, an adequate vocabulary without register shifting

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<sup>12</sup> Given the fast development of technical equipment and the fact that almost each student meanwhile has a mobile phone, in most schools mobiles have been prohibited up to the present. In order to reflect actual topics linked to the students' environment, we will have to periodically modify the topic of the argumentative task; e.g., the parallel task deals with smoking prohibition in schools.

within the text, and a type-token analysis.<sup>13</sup> The different requirements given by these tasks help us to shed light on at least some skills the students can apply: some adolescents might be more competent in writing letters (also due to the fact that they take charge of the entire German correspondence in the family<sup>14</sup>), but might have difficulties in expressing their own opinion in an argumentative way, in using reasons to fortify their viewpoints; still others might have problems in writing a letter because they use a too colloquial way and fail in keeping the appropriate format and a certain formality, but might be successful in writing a report because of being exhaustive describers who generate coherent reports due to the correct use of different connectors.

The most challenging aspect of the assessment presented here is without doubt the one concerning stylistic aspects of the texts. Interestingly, high scores in the grammatical domain do not imply high scores in the “style” domain. Thus, being a writer who follows grammatical rules does not guarantee writing in a proper manner, and inversely, getting a high rating in the domain of conceptual-literal aspects of written texts does not indicate grammatical correctness. This is a very important observation, given that the most common supporting practice in schools is restricted to context-free grammatical exercises (cf. the discussion in Haberzettl, 2009). Getting good marks in these kinds of tests therefore does not indicate anything about the students’ abilities in *Schuldeutsch*, the particular register needed in school. Instead, exercises should involve different text genres in order to test the students’ ability to use language in different settings.

Measuring the mentioned stylistic aspects in written texts is anything but easy. First of all, we risk to fall through the demand of objectivity. Different from asking a native speaker to judge a sentence as grammatical or not, when asking someone to rate whether a sentence is stylistic adequate various individual factors influence the answer; culture group, academic performance, attitude to written language, routine in writing, practise in evaluating, etc. In order to avoid too individual ratings, texts must be evaluated by more than one researcher. Furthermore, experience in evaluating should be collected in a coding-handbook with varied examples. Secondly, the factors belonging to the style domain must clearly be defined. This is surely a topic for further research. So far, we believe a certain format, the use of adequate connections and of an adequate vocabulary to be fundamental conditions for testing conceptual-literal skills.

Curiously, when comparing a small sample of our supporting students’ results in the *Schuldeutsch* tasks with their results in completing a C-Test assessed by Gruhn (2008), we find out that the student who performed best in the C-Test (98%) is the one who composed letter no. 23. In *Schuldeutsch*, she mastered all three domains in both tasks very well. At the same time, the student who performed worst in the

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<sup>13</sup> The type-token analysis has not yet been applied for the letter task.

<sup>14</sup> Along to the test we also conducted a questionnaire, where for example several students indicated that they often have to write letters for family members.

C-Test is a girl who was also rated very well in all domains of Schuldeutsch. By contrast, another good performer of the C-Test (89%) had very good results in the grammatical correctness in the two tasks, but she only ranges in the upper third in the domains (a) and (c). Of course, this is just exemplary. However, we think it is disputable that particularly academic skills are tested in C-Tests. One reason for this might be that the C-Test, in contrast to the abovementioned claims, is not a good instrument for testing different language registers at all, because – due to its construction – it only checks different text genres at random. This also might be the reason why Eckhardt (2008) did not find any significant differences between language minority and monolingual children when using the C-Test. Recently, we assess a larger group of students using the C-Test in order to better compare the tests' results with the Schuldeutsch results. Another outcome of this comparison might also be the answer to the question of whether the C-Test is adequate for testing proficiency in using different text genres or not.

Eckhardt (2008) points out that it is important to determine since when technical language becomes an essential role in school settings. Her study suggests that in elementary school oral communication is still more linked to everyday life rather than to a more academic speech. Afterwards, we need to check whether language minority students have more problems in acquiring and using this speech register, and if yes, why it is so. After all, monolingual students also have to negotiate with this new language they do not use in everyday life, and thus acquire new vocabulary and complex grammatical structures related to school context (for an overview of the particularities proposed for technical language cf. Eckhardt, 2008). But again, this is a challenge all students must meet, monolingual and bilingual alike. So far, the only differences which might be responsible for the unequal achievement of the two groups could be (1), that context-related language is linked to cultural imprint or (2), that the family background makes a difference, as proposed in e.g. the PISA results (e.g. Prenzel et al., 2004) or in Eckhardt (2008). Accordingly, the social status – or better the missing access to higher education given in the families – might be the reason for the difference in learning success.

With respect to the claim that technical language might not be testable in elementary school, we must recall that in Germany, after the 4 years of elementary school, children are divided into three different school types: Hauptschule (secondary modern school), Realschule (secondary technical school), and Gymnasium students (upper secondary school, grammar school). This occurs depending on the marks they got in elementary school. In our study, we have stated that the percentage of correctness in grammar does not differ between school type and grade, but that the percentages in domain (a), following the task's requirements, raise the higher the grade the better the school type. Furthermore, comparing Hauptschule and Gymnasium with respect to domain (c), conceptual-literal skills, we find that the latter students outperform the others (Cantone & Haberzettl, in prep.). This could be seen as an external validation of our test: if the learners of the Hauptschule had outperformed the Gymnasium students, one

would have wondered about that. Moreover, school type and instruction type seem to be the reason for the bad scores of Hauptschule students. Our observations made in such classes have shown that teachers do not expect preciseness and they do not demand efforts to use an academic language style. It might therefore be important to test young schoolchildren before they are divided in different school types which seem to influence their performances.

Once we have asserted that certain skills are less available to language minority students, an important matter is to find adequate methods to support these students in acquiring these skills. As already mentioned, remedial lessons should not be narrowed by simple vocabulary exercises or practicing specific grammatical constructions, but rather be composed of interplays of expressing thoughts and opinions with the help of specific vocabulary and specific sentence structures. Students need to practice the connections of assertions, to understand the meaning of each connector, to grasp how to use different elements in order to generate cohesion. Furthermore, students should be sensitized to context-related variants of language from early on.

As for the relevance of the results of *Schuldeutsch*, which measures specific skills relevant for school success, we act on the assumption that (a), following the task's requirement, and (b), grammatical skills, both test *Ausbildungswissen*, formative knowledge, whereas (c), the stylistic adequacy domain, might test *Bildungswissen*, orientational knowledge. As discussed in Dirks (2008), the former includes the ability to reproduce knowledge about rules, information, and cultural techniques. For mastering the text domain, Dirks (2008) explicitly points to the acquisition and the application of genre knowledge (p. 104). In contrast, orientational knowledge implies the application of formative knowledge in particular cases and the ability to transfer this knowledge to different learning settings and different tasks required in instructional contexts. Since we selected the topics according to the students' environment, we believe they can make use of general knowledge interrelated to tasks experienced in instructional settings, so that their ability to adopt different kinds of knowledge also comes to the fore. Particularly the domain of stylistic adequacy/ conceptual literacy (in different text genres) is qualified for testing text production and understanding and for implementing text inherent techniques (as e.g. format, use of adequate connections and of vocabulary according to the topic/ task). Along these lines, not only ad hoc output is tested in the diagnostic instrument *Schuldeutsch*, but also long-term outcomes of independent, reflexive and aim- and application-oriented practice of knowledge.

With respect to the present findings of our assessment, the fact that the domain of conceptual-literacy has throughout the worst results indicate that orientational knowledge and thus outcomes are not the focus of schooling at present. It is no wonder students perform better in domains here attributed to formative knowledge, as e.g. morpho-syntactic correctness and following the task's requirements, if skills concerning different styles according to different text genres

and if transfer of form of expressions and implementation of application-oriented knowledge are not sufficiently taught in school.

We believe that the advantage of our diagnostic instrument is precisely the fact that it tests the students' proficiency in dealing with different text genres, including a letter, an argumentative text and a report. In this way, we try to measure the level of written competence in each analyzed young adolescent and thus enable individual support. For those groups who have repeatedly been tested, we are additionally able to ascertain learning progress.

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## Appendix

### a) Briefaufgabe:

Du bist seit 2 Jahren in einem Sportverein und spielst in einer Mannschaft (z.B. Volleyball, Fußball, Cheerleading). Jetzt musst du damit aufhören. Du kannst den Trainer nicht mehr persönlich sprechen und musst einen Brief schreiben, um dich abzumelden. Der Trainer ist sehr nett, aber du hast auch großen Respekt vor ihm. Du siezt ihn. In deinem Brief sollst du auf jeden Fall Folgendes zum Ausdruck bringen: Bedauern über den Ausstieg aus der Mannschaft, Begründung: Zeitmangel z.B. wegen der Abschlussprüfungen, vieler Hausaufgaben, Teilnahme am Förderunterricht, Dank.

### b) Briefaufgabe Nr. 12

Hi Markus! Wie geht es dir? Du wunderst dich jetzt bestimmt wieso ich dir einen Brief schreibe. Der Grund dafür ist, im Moment habe ich wenig Zeit für mich selber und habe einen Zeitmangel, weil ich mich für der Schulabschluss vorbereiten muss. Daher wollte ich dir nur mitteilen, dass ich leider mit dem Handball aufhören werde. Aber ich werde euch weiterhin besuchen, sobald ich Zeit habe. Mit freundlichen Grüßen ....

### c) Briefaufgabe Nr. 23

Liebe Anett, leider kann ich es dir nicht persönlich sagen, aber ich muss mit dem Reiten aufhören! Wegen der Vorbereitung meines Schulabschlusses und dem damit verbundenen Stress, kann ich nicht mehr jeden Tag zum Reiten kommen. Es tut mir total Leid und ich bin auch sehr traurig, dass du nicht mehr meine Reitlehrerin sein kannst. Die Reitstunden bei dir haben immer sehr viel Spaß gemacht und auch wenn ich privat Sorgen und Kummer hatte, konnte ich mit dir über meine Probleme sprechen. Ich werde auch alle Pferde und Ponys vermissen. Ich hoffe, dass wir uns irgendwann wiedersehen! Ich werde, wenn ich Zeit habe dich besuchen kommen! Ich bedanke mich ganz herzlich für die wunderschönen Stunden mit dir und den Pferden! Deine Reitschülerin

d) Handyaufgabe

An deiner Schule sollen Handys in Zukunft verboten werden. Schüler dürften dann keine Handys mehr mit zur Schule nehmen.

Schreibe, ob du dafür oder dagegen bist und erkläre auch warum (mindestens drei Gründe).

e) Handyaufgabe Nr. 20

Ich bin eigentlich dafür, weil es eine gute Sache in bezug auf die Umgebung ist. Ich kann aus erfahrung sagen, dass das Handyverbot positiv auf die Umgebung wirkt. Öfters war es so dass die meisten Schüler mit ihren Handys musik gehört haben oder sogar neben den Klassen telefoniert haben. Es gibt keine streiterein mehr in bezug auf die Handys, wer das besser, schöner oder funktionstüchtigere Handy hat. Viele Prügelein, die auf den Schulhöfen statt gefunden haben, wurden meisten von den Schüler aufgenommen und im Internet veröffentlicht. All diese aufzählungen wurden durch das Verbot aufgehoben.

f) Handyaufgabe Nr. 88

Ich bin einerseits dagegen aber auch dafür. Dagegen bin ich, weil in unserer Schule braucht man handys. Falls man aus dem Dorf kommt oder ein Notfall ist. Dafür bin ich, weil in unserer Schule oft Handys geklaut werden. Zumeist im Sportunterricht (in der Umkleide) oder auch während des Unterrichtes. Schüler benutzen ihre Handys sowieso nicht!!! Velt. nur 10% und 90% Prozent nur um zu angeben. Und wenn sie Pech haben wird es geklaut.

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