

STUDY CONCERNING THE BILINGUALITY OF THE STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PETROSANI

Ph. D. Eva BOCSA
University of Petrosani, Romania
bocsaeva@yahoo.com

Ph. D. Lavinia HULEA
University of Petrosani, Romania
laviniahulea@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT. THIS RESEARCH ATTEMPTS BOTH AT ANALYZING THE FORMS OF BILINGUALITY SPECIFIC TO THE STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PETROSANI, AND COMPARING THE STUDENTS' POSSESSION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES WITH THEIR PARENTS' POSSESSION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES, AND AT IDENTIFYING THE STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS THAT CONCERN THE STUDY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES.

A NUMBER OF 115 STUDENTS PARTICIPATED IN THE RESEARCH AND THEY WERE REQUIRED TO ANSWER A QUESTIONNAIRE, WHICH REVEALED THAT 86.95% OF THE STUDENTS POSSESS ONE FOREIGN LANGUAGE, AT LEAST, SO THAT THEY CAN BE CONSIDERED AS BILINGUAL. IN THE CASE OF THE BILINGUAL STUDENTS, 83% OF THEM DISPLAY A DOMINANT, ARTIFICIAL (EDUCATIONAL) BILINGUALITY. IN THE CASE OF THE OTHER STUDENTS, BILINGUALITY IS BALANCED, NATURAL. THE STUDENTS POSSESS A LARGER NUMBER OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES THAN THEIR PARENTS AND MOST OF THEM WOULD LIKE TO STUDY OTHER LANGUAGES, BESIDES THOSE THEY ALREADY KNOW, THEIR MAIN MOTIVATION RESIDING IN GETTING BETTER CHANCES TO FIND JOBS ABROAD.

KEYWORDS: BILINGUALITY, MOTHER TONGUE, FOREIGN LANGUAGES, COMPARISON, EXPECTATIONS.

Introduction

This research represents a continuation of our previous preoccupations concerning the study of bilinguality (*Bilinguality-A Topical Phenomenon and Psychological and Educational Implications of Bilinguality*). In these analyses we showed that there is no consensus among psycho-linguists regarding the definition of bilinguality. Bloomfield (in accordance with Borbély A., 2008) considers that one may speak about bilinguality in the case an individual uses two different languages the manner he/ she uses mother tongue. Macnamara (according to Hamers and Blanc, 2000, p. 6) supports the idea that a bilingual person is the one who, in a language that differs from his/ her native tongue, displays a minimal competence in one of the following four verbal abilities, at least: speech understanding, speaking, reading or writing. Certain authors also mention a fifth linguistic competence, cognitive competence, which regards the capacity of using the languages one possesses as instruments of thinking. Bilinguality may be regarded as a continual

dimension along which one may represent bilingual individuals depending on the level of knowledge and usage of two or several languages. At one end of this dimension, perfect bilinguals (ambi-linguals) may be placed, while at the opposite end, those displaying at least one of the verbal abilities, at a minimal level, may be placed.

Bilinguality exhibits various forms that can be classified depending on different criteria. Further we display a few of them, especially those which this article deals with.

Depending on the degree of linguistic competence, Lambert (according to Hamers and Blanc, 2000, p. 27) considers that bilinguality is balanced (similar linguistic competences in the languages possessed) or dominant (competence in one of the languages – mother tongue, as a rule - is higher than the competence in the other languages).

Depending of the age a person becomes bilingual, one may speak about childhood bilinguality (that is up to the age of 10/ 11), teenage bilinguality (between 10/11 and 17) or adult age bilinguality (after 17).

Depending on the context an individual becomes a bilingual, bilinguality may be natural (both languages are acquired spontaneously, in the family milieu and / or group of friends) or artificial/ educational (the second language is acquired at kindergarten, school, etc.).

Objectives and methodology of research

This research relies on observation and has in view the following **objectives**:

- Obtaining a series of data concerning the possession of the mother tongue and of foreign languages by the students of the University of Petrosani; having started from the data we got we tried to set forth the forms of bilingualism that may be encountered;
- Drawing out a series of comparisons, from the perspective of possessing foreign languages, between the present-day students and their parents;
- Grasping the students’ intentions regarding the study of foreign languages;
- Identifying resemblances and differences between the students born in Romania and those born in the Republic of Moldova as far as bilinguality/ multilinguality is concerned.

The research included 115 students of the University of Petrosani. Most of these students (87 students, namely 75.70%) are from Romania and 28 (24.30%) from the Republic of Moldova.

Method employed. With a view to getting the required data concerning the possession of the native tongue and of foreign languages, the students were asked to answer a questionnaire. All the students agreed to take part in this research. They were required to give data about their mother tongue, about the foreign languages they possess, about the context they acquired these languages (in family, at school or under different circumstances), and about the domains they use these languages. The students made a self-assessment that concerned the extent to which they possess their mother tongue and the foreign languages nominated. Data were asked about the foreign languages possessed by the parents of the participants in the research. Finally, the students were asked about other languages they would like to acquire and the reason they believe foreign languages possession is important.

Analysis and data interpretation

A. Mother tongue. The mother tongue of most students is Romanian (94.80% of the participants in the research). All the students from the Republic of Moldova state that their mother tongue is Romanian. For 93.10% of the students from Romania their mother tongue is Romanian. For 5 of

them (5.74% of the total number of students from Romania), their mother tongue is Hungarian, while one student has two mother tongues: Romanian and Italian.

Self-assessment of the degree of mother tongue possession. The students self-assessed the four fundamental linguistic abilities: understanding spoken language, understanding a read text, speaking, and writing, and gave themselves grades ranging from “very well” and “well” to “sufficiently” and “insufficiently”. We assumed that all the students possess their mother tongue very well, yet their self-assessment showed something different (Table no. 1).

Table no. 1. Self-assessment regarding the possession of the mother tongue (%)

	Very well	Well	Sufficiently	No answer
Understanding of speech	87	12.20	0.80	-
Understanding of a read text	84.30	13	2.60	-
Speaking	81.70	15.70	1.70	0.90
Writing	80	15.70	1.70	2.60

72.20% of the students give themselves only “very well” grades, so that they consider they possess their mother tongue very well. 8.69% of the subjects give themselves “well” or “sufficiently” grades in all the four aspects of the language, and 4.34% gave themselves three such grades. These students consider they have deficiencies in using their mother tongue. The students from Romania and the Republic of Moldova are similar in their self-assessment (Fig. 1).

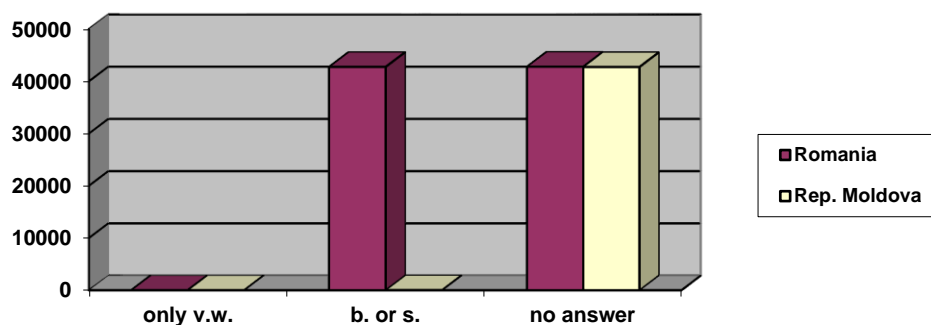


Fig. 1. Self-assessment concerning the possession of the mother tongue

B. Foreign languages. The students were required to show the foreign languages they possess as well as the level of their knowledge. The number of foreign languages shown by the students ranges from 0 to 4 (Table no. 2). As an average, the subjects state that they know 1.92 foreign languages ($\sigma = 0,97$). The students from the Republic of Moldova state that they know more foreign languages than the students from Romania (Republic of Moldova: average = 2.50, $\sigma = 0.83$, min = 1, max = 4; Romania: average = 1.73, $\sigma = 0.94$, min = 0, max = 4) (Fig. 2).

Table no. 2. Number of foreign languages possessed

No. of foreign languages	0	1	2	3	4	Total
Abs.	4	41	36	28	6	115
%	3.50	35.70	31.30	24.30	5.20	100

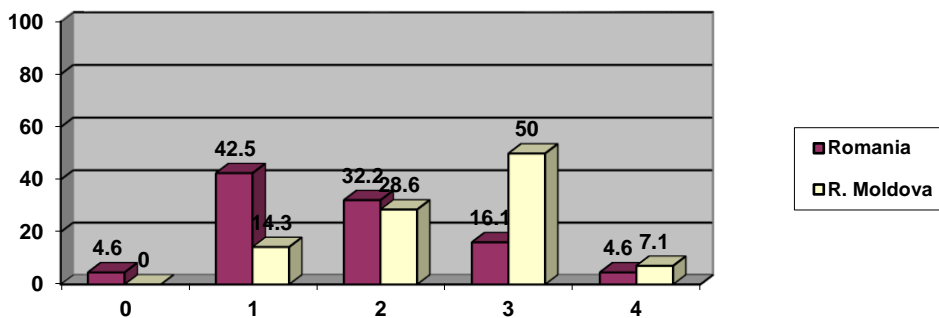


Fig. 2. Number of foreign languages possessed by the students from Romania and the Republic of Moldova (%)

Certain students mentioned that they acquired a low level of foreign languages, which is probably unusable. Starting from the opinions of Macnamara, we consider that we can speak about **bilinguality** in the case when, at least, as far as two criteria are concerned, the subject self-assessed himself/ herself according to a “well” or “very well” grade. In such cases, the language can be used by the individual. In accordance with this principle, 100 subjects may be considered as bilingual (86.95% of the entire sample). They possess, as an average, 1.64 foreign languages ($\sigma = 0.75$, $\min = 1$, $\max = 3$), (Table no. 3). The number of foreign languages possessed by the students from the Republic of Moldova is slightly higher than that of those from Romania (Romania: average = 1.61, $\sigma = 0.77$, $\min = 1$, $\max = 3$; Moldova: average = 1.70, $\sigma = 0.72$, $\min = 1$, $\max = 3$) (Fig. 3).

Table no. 3. Number of foreign languages possessed by bilingual/ multilingual students

No. of foreign languages	1	2	3	Total
Abs.	52	31	17	100
%	52	31	17	100

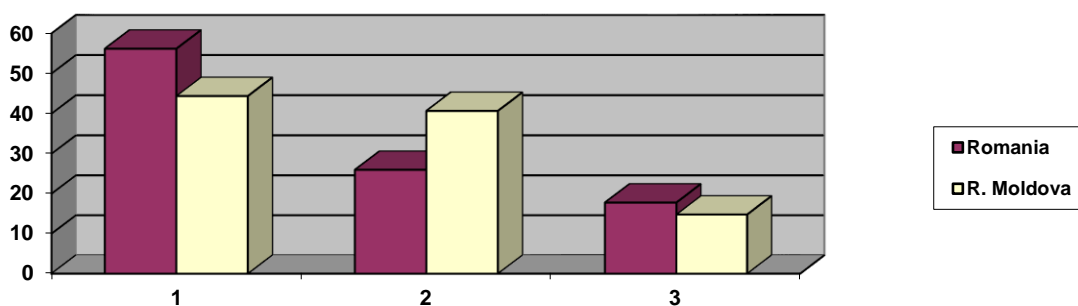


Fig. 3. Number of foreign languages possessed by the bilingual/ multilingual students from Romania and the Republic of Moldova (%)

In the case we refer to the 100 students who may be considered bilingual, English is the language mostly possessed, followed by Russian and French. There are important differences

between the students from the two countries concerning the languages they possess. Almost all the students from the Republic of Moldova (92.59%) possess very well Russian, which the Romanian students hardly possess. English is possessed to a wider extent by the students from Romania (86.30%) than by those from the Republic of Moldova (29.62%). As far as the students from Romania are concerned, we should mention that all the five students, for whom Hungarian is their mother tongue, stated that they use Romanian very well.

Table no. 4. Foreign languages possessed by bilingual students (%)

Foreign language	Whole sample (N=100)	Students from Romania (N = 73)	Students from the Republic of Moldova (N = 27)
English	71	86.30	29.62
Russian	26	1.36	92.59
French	25	23.28	29.62
Spanish	16	19.17	7.40
Italian	12	15.06	3.70
Romanian	5	6.84	
German	4	5.47	
Ukrainian	2		7.40
Hungarian	1	1.36	
Portuguese	1	1.36	
Korean	1	1.36	

With a view to finding out to what extent we deal with a **balanced** or **dominant** bilinguality, we further compared the linguistic competences of the bilingual subjects afferent to their mother tongue and to the foreign language they possess best.

79 students of the whole sample state that they better use their mother tongue (79.45% of the students from Romania and 77.77% of the students from the Republic of Moldova). 4 students from Romania state that they better use a foreign language than their mother tongue. Of these, 3 have Hungarian as their mother tongue, nonetheless they state that they better possess Romanian, while one has Romanian as his/ her mother tongue, but better possesses English. In the case of 83% of the bilingual students, we can speak about a **dominant bilinguality**.

17 students possess both their mother tongue and a foreign language to the same extent. In this case, their bilinguality appears as **balanced**. When analyzing the two groups separately, we may notice that we deal with a balanced bilinguality in the case of 1/5 (22.22%) of the students from the Republic of Moldova, as they all possess both Romanian and Russian to the same extent. In the case of 11 (15.06%) participants from Romania, bilinguality is balanced. Among them, 5 declare that they possess both Romanian and English to the same extent, 2 possess Romanian and Italian to the same extent, one possesses Romanian and Russian to the same extent, and one Romanian and Spanish. One student whose mother tongue is Hungarian possesses Romanian to the same extent, while one whose mother tongue is also Hungarian, possesses both Romanian and Italian to the same extent.

Context in accordance with which foreign languages were acquired. 26 students (12 from Romania and 14 from the Republic of Moldova) acquired a second (third) language within their family milieu. The 12 individuals from Romania acquired English within their families (5 persons), Italian (3), Romanian (2, mentioning Hungarian as their mother tongue), Hungarian (1) and

Russian (1). Of the 14 students from the Republic of Moldova, 13 used to speak Russian within their families, while one used to speak French. Two students also used in their families Italian, namely Ukrainian, besides Russian. In these cases, both the mother tongue and the foreign languages were acquired in the same context and during the same period of life. Accordingly, in the case of 26% of the bilingual subjects we deal with childhood **bilinguality**, which is also a **natural bilinguality**. Although both languages were acquired within the family milieu, during childhood, only in the case of 8 subjects the two languages are similarly used, so that bilinguality became **balanced**.

In a series of cases the foreign language acquired in the family is also acquired subsequently at school. In other cases, the foreign language was acquired only at school and we accordingly deal with a **teenage bilinguality**, which is an **artificial (educational) bilinguality**. English (acquired by 63% of the students belonging to the analyzed sample), French (22%), Russian (12%), Italian (5%), Spanish (4%), Romanian (3%), German (1%), and Ukrainian (1%) were all acquired as mentioned previously. Although the study of the foreign language began at school age, 6 individuals state that they use that language to the same extent they use their mother tongue. In the case of these individuals we probably deal with a **balanced** bilinguality.

Certain individuals acquired a foreign language outside their families and without learning it at school. Spanish was acquired in this manner by 9 individuals (5 of them state that they learnt Spanish while watching TV, one, owing to the fact that he/ she lived in Spain, and the others owing to the fact that they had friends with whom they used to communicate in this language). German was accordingly acquired by 3 individuals (one of them worked in Germany), Italian by 3 individuals who lived in Italy, English by two persons (owing to Internet games). Under such circumstances, we deal with **teenage or adult age bilinguality**, which is also an **artificial bilinguality**. As far as linguistic competences are concerned, the 3 individuals who acquired Italian without having studied it at school state that they use this language to the same extent they use their mother tongue, so that we probably deal with a **balanced** bilinguality in this case.

Use of foreign languages. The main domains where the possessed languages are used are the following ones:

- Oral communication with the family members and/ or friends;
- Getting data through reading books, magazines;
- Internet communication;
- Travelling, working or studying abroad.

Certain individuals, although they possess foreign languages, do not use them at all. The manner and extent to which the languages possessed by the students belonging to the sample are used/ are not used is displayed by Tables no. 5 and 6. With a view to determine the degree of use/ nonuse of a language, expressed in percent, we compare the number of students who nominate a certain domain of use with the total number of students who state that they possess that language.

Table no. 5. Use of foreign languages by the students from Romania (%)

	No. of students who possess the language	Domains of use				Nonuse
		Oral communication	Reading	Internet	Travelling, working, studying abroad	
English	63	20.60	44.40	57.10	85.70	1.58

Russian	1	-	-	100	-	-
French	17	11.70	29.40	17.60	52.90	35.20
Spanish	14	-	21.40	28.50	57.10	21.40
Italian	11	36.30	27.20	27.20	81.80	-
Romanian	5	100	80	80	40	-
German	6	16.60	33.30	50	66.60	-
Hungarian	1	100	-	-	-	-
Portuguese	1	-	-	-	100	-
Korean	1	-	-	-	100	-

In the case we do not consider the languages possessed by less than 3 individuals, we may assert that the foreign languages are mainly used when an individual travels, works or studies abroad. From this perspective, the most “capitalized” languages are English (used with this goal in view by 85.70% of those who possess it) and Italian (81.80%). The most “useless” language is, in accordance with the participants, French. One third of those who possess it do not use it.

Table no. 6. Use of foreign languages by the students from the Republic of Moldova (%)

	No. of students who possess the language	Domains of use				No use
		Oral communication	Reading	Internet	Travelling, working, studying abroad	
English	8	12.50	50	87.50	87.50	-
Russian	25	92	56	80	64	-
French	8	-	75	-	75	-
Spanish	2	-	50	50	50	-
Italian	1	-	-	100	-	-
Ukrainian	2	-	50	-	-	50

The students who came to study in Romanian from the Republic of Moldova “capitalize” Russian to a larger extent, which they use to communicate with their families and the people around them. They also use English to a large extent when they travel, work or study in a foreign country.

We further analyzed the manner foreign languages are used by the individuals displaying a **balanced bilinguality**, namely by those who state they use their mother tongue to the same extent they use one or several foreign languages. As we have already mentioned, we identified 17 individuals who belong to this category. They speak 18 foreign languages to the extent they speak their mother tongue. These individuals use the foreign languages they possess in various fields that deal with their private or professional life, capitalizing the languages possessed to a large extent (Table no. 7).

Table no. 7. Use of foreign languages by the students displaying a balanced bilinguality (%)

	No. of languages in the case of	Oral communication	Reading	Internet	Travelling, working,

	which we deal with a balanced bilinguality				studying abroad
Romania	12	33.30	91.60	83.30	91.60
Republic of Moldova	6	83.30	100	100	100

C. Foreign languages possessed by the subjects' parents. As we have already mentioned, the students belonging to the analyzed sample possess, as an average, 1.92 foreign languages ($\sigma = 0.97$, min = 0, max = 4). Compared to the number of languages possessed by the students, the number of foreign languages possessed by their parents is much smaller. Fathers possess, as an average, 0.77 languages ($\sigma = 0.86$, min = 0, max = 4), while mothers 0.81 languages ($\sigma = 0.77$, min = 0, max = 3). We consider interesting the existence of a statistically significant correlation between the number of foreign languages possessed by the students and their fathers ($r = 0.237$; $p = 0.014$), namely mothers ($r = 0.351$; $p = 0.001$). Meanwhile, the number of foreign languages possessed by the two parents significantly correlates ($r = 0.659$; $p = 0.001$). These data suggest that, in the case parents give importance to the study of foreign languages, their children would, at their turn, manifest interest in foreign languages.

The parents of the students from the Republic of Moldova possess more foreign languages than the parents of the students from Romania (Table no. 8). In the case of fathers, the average represents 1.40 ($\sigma = 0.79$), while the average of those from Romania is 0.56 ($\sigma = 0.78$). The difference is statistically highly significant ($t = 4.76$; $p = 0.001$). The mothers of the students from the Republic of Moldova possess, as an average, 1.46 foreign languages ($\sigma = 0.63$), while those from Romania 0.60 foreign languages ($\sigma = 0.69$). In the case of mothers, too, the difference is statistically highly significant ($t = 5.93$; $p = 0.001$).

Table no. 8. Number of foreign languages possessed by the parents of the students from Romania and the Republic of Moldova

		Number of foreign languages possessed						Total
		0	1	2	3	4		
Romania	Fathers	Abs. No.	47	24	9	-	1	81
		%	58	29.60	11.10	-	1.20	100
	Mothers	Abs. No.	42	37	4	2	-	85
		%	49.40	43.50	4.70	2.40	-	100
Republic of Moldova	Fathers	Abs. No.	2	15	7	3	-	27
		%	7.40	55.60	25.90	11.10	-	100
	Mothers	Abs. No.	1	14	12	1	-	28
		%	3.60	50	42.90	3.60	-	100

The parents of the students from Romania especially possess those foreign languages studied at school (English and French). Almost all the parents of the students from the Republic of Moldova possess Russian, which they studied at school, but which they also use in the daily

communication with the family and the members of the community they live in. French is also possessed by a large number of parents of the students from the Republic of Moldova.

Table no. 9. Foreign languages possessed by the subjects' parents

Foreign language	Romania				Republic of Moldova			
	Fathers		Mothers		Fathers		Mothers	
	Abs. no.	%	Abs. no.	%	Abs. no.	%	Abs. no.	%
English	14	17.20	11	12.90	1	3.70	3	10.70
Russian	8	9.80	9	10.50	25	92.50	27	96.40
French	9	11.10	12	14.10	5	18.50	6	21.40
Spanish	2	2.40	4	4.70	1	3.70	-	-
Italian	1	1.20	5	5.80	2	7.40	2	7.10
German	4	4.90	2	2.30	1	3.70	-	-
Ukrainean	-	-	-	-	2	7.40	1	3.50
Hungarian	7	8.60	7	8.20	-	-	-	-
Czech	-	-	1	1.10	-	-	1	3.50
Hebraic	-	-	-	-	1	3.70	1	3.50
Latin	1	1.20	-	-	-	-	-	-

E. The students' expectations concerning the study of foreign languages are quite varied. A lot of students would like to study German (40.2% of the participants from Romania and 64.2% of those from the Republic of Moldova). Meanwhile, they manifest their interest for studying Spanish, French, Italian, and English. We should also mention the fact that all the students from the Republic of Moldova would like to continue studying at least one foreign language, while about 10% of the students from Romania do not want this (Table no. 10).

Table no. 10. Foreign languages students would like to study

Language	Romania		Republic of Moldova	
	Abs. no.	%	Abs. no.	%
German	35	40.20	18	64.20
Spanish	20	22.90	4	14.20
French	19	21.80	4	14.20
Italian	12	13.70	8	28.50
English	11	12.60	9	32.10
Russian	7	8.00	-	-
Chinese	5	5.70	4	14.20
Japanese	4	4.50	-	-
Korean	2	2.20	1	3.50
Hungarian	2	2.20	-	-
Turkish	-	-	3	10.70
Portuguese	1	1.10	1	3.50
Hebraic	1	1.10	1	3.50
Arabian	1	1.10	-	-

Greek	1	1.10	-	-
Polish	-	-	1	3.50
Danish	1	1.10	-	-
Norwegian	1	1.10	-	-
No language	8	9.10	-	-

The last question addressed to the students was meant to find out why the students believe it is important to study foreign languages. Their answers can be ranged along 4 categories:

- With a view to find a job in a different country more easily (27% answers);
- With a view to travelling (27%);
- With a view to communicate with people belonging to other cultures (27%);
- For one’s personal development: for studying, reading original works or enriching general culture (19%).

Conclusions

The percent of the students who possess at least two languages and may be considered bilingual (in accordance with the definition given by Macnamara) is high (86.95% subjects belonging to the analyzed sample). As far as the types of bilinguality are concerned, in the case of 83% of the students, bilinguality is dominant, that is they better possess their mother tongue than a foreign language. In the case of the others, bilinguality is balanced, that is they possess their mother tongue and a foreign language to the same extent. As far as the age the foreign language was acquired at, in 26% of the cases this happened during childhood, within the family milieu (childhood bilinguality, which is also a natural biliguality). In the case of 74% of the students, bilinguality is artificial and the acquiring of the foreign languages happened during teenage period and even during adulthood.

The foreign language possessed by most of the students from Romania is English, followed by French, Spanish, and Italian. They use foreign languages especially when they travel or work abroad. Almost all the students who came to study at the University of Petrosani from the Republic of Moldova possess Russian, followed by English and French. They use these languages with a view to communicate with the people around them and when travelling.

The students possess a higher number of foreign languages than their parents. There is a significant correlation between the number of foreign languages possessed by parents and their children, which suggests the influence of education upon bilinguality.

As far as their future is concerned, the students would like to acquire other foreign languages, too. They prefer German and would like to continue studying foreign languages especially as they hope to be able to find a job more easily.

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