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Educational Potential of Multilingual Picture Books in an EFL  
Classroom

MASTER'S THESIS

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*This study was of an exploratory character and it looked into the educational potential of multilingual picture books in an EFL classroom, as well as pupils' and teachers' attitudes to such material. The study was done with 63 pupils and 30 teachers and the data was collected through a questionnaire. The results of the study showed that attitudes to multilingual picture books are generally positive and that both teachers and students recognize the educational potential and advantages they offer. Furthermore, it was concluded that multilingual picture books can be used to achieve various curricular aims: from linguistic, cultural and educational to motivating children into learning additional foreign languages.*

Key words: *multilingual picture books, multilingualism, plurilingual education, Subway Sparrow*

## **1. Introduction**

Teaching any subject includes far more than just the subject matter itself – all teachers are also educators and therefore have the task of preparing and shaping students for the future and society. This means that teaching a foreign language, e.g. English, encompasses not only knowledge of the language, but also knowledge about the language – its place and role in the society, other languages that possibly affected it in the past or others that are similar to it. Students learn languages not only through practice, explanation and experience, but also through awareness of similarities and differences between languages and cultures. Considering today's growing migration, globalization, cultural and linguistic pluralism, it is evidently the case that making students aware of these differences goes far beyond just teaching about a language. It points to questions of tolerance, cooperation, understanding and multiculturalism. Although these principles are present in the Croatian school curriculum, it still lacks an all-encompassing view of language learning and teaching. Children are only encouraged to make comparisons between, e.g., English/German and Croatian culture (Vican & Milanović Litre, 2006), but there is no mention of comparing several foreign languages and how they work – general language education and the interrelationship between different foreign languages is only yet to be included in the curriculum. One way to achieve the goal, aside from adopting a plurilingual educational approach, is to turn to multilingual picture books, especially since Croatian FL teachers are offered the possibility of using stories, picture books and songs in their classes (Vican & Milanović Litre, 2006, p. 83-117).

Therefore, this study will examine the educational potential of multilingual picture books. It will look into teachers' as well as students' attitudes to bringing other foreign languages into the English language classroom and their attitudes to using materials which in our view promote multilingualism in the classroom. It is hoped that the study will also broaden the views of English language teachers and learners.

## **2. Theoretical background**

Language is an everyday phenomenon, an integral part of people's lives, and as such it is in its entirety liable to and influenced by cultural, societal and even political changes. In the present situation of increased migration, we are faced with serious changes in society: migrating groups bring not only their culture, but also their language, and as a result, there is a growing number of foreign languages and minority members. Thus, knowing two languages is no longer enough to ensure communication with all members of society, and bilingualism has become insufficient. Various data lead to the conclusion that multilingualism and plurilingualism have become the new norm: e.g. since 2013 there are now 28 official languages in the EU, and as many as 40-100 mother tongues (Zeevaert, Thijs, 2007, p. 2). Moreover, with the emergence of growing cultural and linguistic diversity, the importance of promoting equality, mutual understanding and cooperation as well as tolerance has grown significantly. In the light of these societal changes, teachers and schools are faced with a new task and might be forced to change their pedagogies.

In 2001 the Council of Europe called for the protection and development of diverse European languages and cultures, explaining that linguistic diversity should not be seen as a barrier, but should be developed and protected with the aim of creating a mutually respectful society:

It is only through a better knowledge of European modern languages that it will be possible to facilitate communication and interaction among Europeans of different mother tongues in order to promote European mobility, mutual understanding and co-operation, and overcome prejudice and discrimination. (p. 2)

Following this idea, schools in Croatia today offer bilingual and multilingual educational programs, which might by some be seen as a solution to the question of promoting

multilingualism and multiculturalism. However, simply adding more languages to a curriculum is not the answer (Garcia, 2014, p. 96), especially when taking into account the all-pervading hegemony of the English language. Children need some form of encouragement to choose learning a language beyond English, and simply providing them with a choice to do so is not enough. More needs to be done to boost their motivation, openness and curiosity which, according to Hélot (2008) might even be hindered by learning a dominant language like English from an early age (p. 11). Furthermore, the question remains of whether simply learning and knowing several languages is enough to meet the goals proposed by the CEFR, especially since communication is affected not only by knowledge but also by "attitudes, motivation, values and beliefs" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 105). Even if children do choose to learn other languages, what we see as problematic is the absence of interrelationship between languages taught at school. The problem is that various languages that students learn are usually kept apart and seen as unrelated. As Cenoz and Gorter (2013) state, "there is a strong notion of isolating the teaching of English from that of other languages in the curriculum" and teachers are expected "to avoid any reference to elements of the first language (L1) or other languages" (p. 592) when in fact languages that are taught should be linked to one another. According to Cummins's idea of interrelation between languages, the skills and abilities that students acquire in their L1 or L2 are not confined, but can easily be passed on further across all the languages in their linguistic repertoire (Cummins, 2007). Likewise, as Garcia (2011) states, children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are exposed to "concurrent means of communication in many media and languages and, thus, conceptions of bilingualism and multilingualism must also become more flexible" (p. 398). Therefore, connections between languages should be promoted and, as Piccardo (2013) explains, a synergy should be created because teaching as well as learning any language should have "the overall objective of promoting plurilingualism and linguistic diversity" (p. 603-604). Similar point is made by Hélot (2012) who states that by exploring different languages students can become aware of the fact that "bi- or plurilingual speakers are the very ones who build bridges between people of different cultures" (p. 216).

Exploring different languages entails more than just learning new vocabulary or grammatical rules; it is not about how well students can master all the languages in their repertoire or how proficient they are – it is about experiencing languages, discovering the principles behind them, what makes them similar or different from one another, learning about sounds, gestures and, last but not least, learning about the people who speak the language, their country and culture. To young learners, this might not seem crucial or even

important since their main goal in learning a language is achieving flawless performance (spoken as well as written). By focusing on producing fluent and native-like speakers of English, we have forgotten what it actually means to know a language. Learning a foreign language, as described by the Council of Europe (2001), also means "to achieve a wider and deeper understanding of the way of life and forms of thought of other peoples and of their cultural heritage" (p. 3). These principles point to pluralistic education, namely, to two educational models: 1) language awareness; and 2) plurilingual and pluricultural education.

### **2.1. Language Awareness (LA)**

Language awareness includes "explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use" (the Association of Language Awareness website, January 2018). The notion should, however, be distinguished from Language Awareness (LA) as an educational approach, which is aimed at providing students with the opportunity to explore different languages and experience linguistic diversity. LA is more than a teaching model promoting multilingualism – it is not about learning multiple languages, but about "coming into contact with many different languages in order to understand the way language works and the function of languages in society" (Hélot & Young, 2006, p. 79). This approach does not only promote language learning in general, but it is also a possible solution to the problem of choosing to learn languages other than English. Exposing children to a variety of different and less known languages will unquestionably spark their interest, motivation and curiosity (Beacco & Byram, 2007, p.67). Furthermore, by becoming aware of the array of linguistic plurality in Europe, children will learn about tolerance, diversity, cooperation and citizenship. As Fidler (2006) explains, "a plurilingual approach in which students encounter different languages and cultures might be one of the answers to the needs of a society requiring tolerance, openness, and a plurilingual language competence" (p. 346). In her article *Awakening to languages in primary school*, Fidler describes some of the results of the European project *Janua Linguarum – The Gateway to Languages*. The *JALING* project was started by Michel Candelier in 2000 and examined the possibilities of introducing language awareness into the school curriculum. Sixteen countries took part in the project by directly using LA activities in their classrooms in order to "raise students' awareness of similarities and differences between languages" (Fidler, 2006, p. 348). As Fidler (2006) describes, the results of the project showed that students



enjoyed exploring different languages and cultures, were motivated and gained additional metalinguistic competence (p. 346). The results fully met with the expectations and aims of LA stated by Candelier (2004): "the awakening to languages, then, takes us away from the area of teaching/learning a particular language (only so we can return better equipped) and leads us firmly into the area of general language education" (p. 19).

A similar project, the *Didenheim Project* (Hélot & Young, 2006) was done in France, but also included parents alongside teachers and pupils. The goal was similar: to awake students to different languages and cultures and to diversify the choice of languages learned at school, but also to promote tolerance and acceptance as a response to growing racial problems. Classroom activities covered a range of subjects and languages and were created by parents who were minority members and could, therefore, offer their knowledge of various languages (Hélot & Young, 2006). The parents' participation in such projects can certainly bring a touch of authenticity to language learning and provide students with the opportunity to encounter languages that even their teachers are not familiar with. Furthermore, it can give students a glimpse of what the minority students' home languages are and reduce the scepticism of 'the other'. As Hélot and Young (2006) explain, the project yielded children who were "very curious and very keen to discover languages they had never encountered before" and whose questions "showed their thirst for knowledge about language and languages" (p. 80, 81). The project not only introduced children to linguistic, but also cultural diversity: owing to parents' participation, children were able to not only discuss language itself, but the history behind it and social implications around it as well. Furthermore, for the students it cast a new light on what it means to know more than one or two languages and cultures, and how much they can benefit from it. According to Hélot and Young (2006), they were brought to the realization that "understanding cultural diversity was as important as discovering linguistic diversity (...) and that multilingualism is much more of an asset than a disadvantage" (p. 79).

The *JALING* and the *Didenheim* project, both with language awareness principles at their core, are proof that language education, especially in modern times, needs to depart from the practices of isolated teaching of languages and move towards a more integrated approach. Implementing language awareness would take our language education to great lengths. LA represents far more than the current foreign language teaching practices – it "builds bridges" between languages, cultures, subjects and between school and the world in which children live (Hélot & Young, 2006, p. 87). Focusing on the notions of diversity and language exploring, LA aims to fulfil precisely the aforementioned goals set by modern societal

changes. According to Hélot (2008), it holds three dimensions: it deals with knowledge of and about language, with attitudes of openness and tolerance, and it develops plurilingual socialisation (p. 4). Finally, by integrating not only different languages, but also different subject matters (as was the case in the *Didenheim* project), the approach also holds cross-curricular principles (Hélot, 2008, p. 4) and, therefore, prepares children for the complexity and heterogeneity of the world while at the same time offering them plurilingual competence as a tool for surmounting the difficulties that may come.

## ***2.2. Plurilingual and pluricultural education***

Another pluralistic approach heading in a similar direction advocates plurilingual and pluricultural education. Coste, Moore and Zarate (2009) define plurilingual and pluricultural competence as "the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person [...] has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures" (p. 11). It is important at this stage to note that plurilingual approaches do not aim at acquiring high proficiency in a number of languages, but at connecting all the languages from a person's repertoire and identifying their interrelations, as well as challenging the position of the native speaker (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013, p. 594). That means that this approach promotes languages diversity as well as linguistic awareness. Moreover, by comparing and relating languages, students can develop better metalinguistic knowledge and gain general knowledge about languages, that is, "a better perception of what is general and what is specific in the linguistic organisation of different languages" (Coste et al., 2009, p. 11-12). It is also worth noticing that, in the increasingly multi- and plurilingual society that we live in, children daily come into contact with a variety of languages and cultures. This does not necessarily have to happen at school; possibly even unconsciously, they are exposed to plurilingualism and pluriculturalism everywhere on the Internet, through the media and even through tourism. Therefore, each child draws on its own experience and accordingly forms its own attitudes, which do not necessarily have to be positive. In such a case, it is up to the school and, more precisely, to the language education system to reverse the negative attitudes into positive ones. The importance of positive attitudes in language learning is indisputable: due to their great effect on students' learning abilities – negative attitudes can inhibit language learning – an

important goal is "the development of an 'intercultural personality' involving both attitudes and awareness" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 106).

Plurilingual education is a way of giving students a chance to explore languages. It integrates all language teaching and seeks "to enhance and develop language competence and speakers' individual linguistic repertoires, from the earliest schooldays and throughout life" (Beacco & Byram, 2007, p. 18). It promotes, *inter alia*, the awareness that language skills and abilities can be transferred across languages, and the ability to use these relationships to one's advantage, as well as global, integrated language education (Council of Europe, 2005, p. 5). According to Beacco & Byram (2007), the goal of plurilingual education is not teaching as many languages as possible, but developing "plurilingual competence and intercultural education, as a way of living together" (p. 18). They further explain that closely linked to the notion of plurilingual education is pluricultural education which aims at raising awareness and positive attitudes towards differences, be they linguistic, cultural or religious, as well as building interactions and relations with members of other cultures and societies (p. 18). As stated before, this is of great importance today and teachers should become aware that they can no longer teach a language without teaching about culture, society and even other languages. Therefore, it would be to our own benefit to supplement our current language curricula with principles of plurilingual and pluricultural education. The advantages of such an approach are outlined in the *Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education* (Beacco et al., 2016):

First, it facilitates the acquisition of linguistic and intercultural abilities: this involves adding to the linguistic and cultural resources which make up individual repertoires, using the available means efficiently. (...) Secondly, it promotes personal development, so that individuals can realise their full potential: this involves encouraging them to respect and accept diversity of languages and cultures in a multilingual and multicultural society, and helping to make them aware of the extent of their own competences and development potential (p.15).

Clearly, a complete transformation of language curricula might be too much to ask, but even the implementation of some of the principles of this kind of education would bring positive changes. If teachers bring more languages into their classrooms – not in the sense of teaching other languages during an English class, but simply introducing pupils to different languages – they might influence children's attitudes toward languages in general, and even towards

English. Moreover, other subjects can be touched upon in connection to these languages, which would call upon students' general and cross-curricular knowledge. Such activities would help students form bridges between various subjects and promote transfer across languages and subjects (Beacco et al., 2016, p. 11), resulting in overall greater abilities and comprehension. As Piccardo (2013) explains, if teachers were to adopt a plurilingual educational approach in an EFL classroom, "mastery of English would not be the sole objective, but rather one specific aim within a broader perspective of language education and personal development in the broad sense" (p. 610).

The question of how to implement either LA or plurilingual and pluricultural education into the existing curriculum is still in need of an answer. Plurilingual materials, which are a viable option, are few and still in the process of development. However, one possible means of achieving this, which has not been brought to light yet, is the use of multilingual picture books.

### ***2.3. Multilingual picture books***

Literature on multilingual educational materials and especially picture books without translation is scarce. This subject is only yet to be researched. Some multilingual classroom material is available, mainly samples of that used in the *JALING* project which can serve as a good example of how to implement plurilingual educational principles which were discussed earlier. One such worksheet, intended for a German language classroom, deals with the topic of names. Through comparing names and their meanings in different languages, children actually learn about other languages, they learn new words and can even find out something about the traditions of the countries. Another worksheet deals with forms of politeness (more specifically, table manners) in various societies and stresses the importance of familiarizing students with possible differences in order to avoid any problems or misunderstandings when encountering other cultures. Both worksheets promote plurilingualism, linguistic as well as cultural. Unfortunately, none of the worksheets available on the *JALING* website are intended for English classrooms. However, they can serve as a model for creating English worksheets in the future.

Dual-language books or bilingual picture books have been around for some time and there is a wide selection to choose from. These can conveniently be used in a bilingual

classroom for the purpose of connecting students' first and second foreign language, especially when based on translation. Emphasizing the role of translation, Hélot (2011) explains that it offers "an encounter with otherness through the mediation between different cultures" (p. 43). There are also dual-language books with no translation – although these are not numerous – where the languages alternate between characters, passages or paragraphs; e.g. *I like you – und du?* by O'Sullivan and Rösler (1983), or *Romeo@Juliette* by Causse (2006) (Hélot, 2011). However, two languages are no longer sufficient to represent the linguistic complexity of the modern world. Therefore, we need to turn to multilingual picture books, which are even scarcer. One such rare example – recognized by Hélot in her article *Children's literature in the multilingual classroom: Developing multilingual literacy acquisition* (2011) – is Leyla Torres's *Subway Sparrow* (1993/2012), a picture book written in three languages: English, Spanish and Polish. A simple and charming story about four people (English-speaking boy and girl, a Spanish-speaking man and a Polish-speaking woman) working together to save a sparrow caught in a subway car is accompanied by luminous pictures aiding comprehension. With all three languages mixing on almost every page, the picture book is an authentic example of life in a multilingual city (Hélot, 2011, p. 58). Furthermore, apart from three languages, the picture book also offers an insight into different cultures, as the three characters are of different age, gender and nationality. As Hélot (2011) explains, the picture book presents not only multilingualism, but also a multicultural vignette promoting cooperation among cultures (p. 59). Therefore, with an endless number of activities that could be based on it, this book would be an excellent tool for carrying out goals set by plurilingual approaches.

Aside from translation, the notion of translanguaging should also be mentioned at this stage. Garcia (2014) describes translanguaging as a dynamic multilingual process which is based on "the belief that bilinguals and multilinguals select features and co-construct or *soft-assemble* their language practices from a variety of relational contexts in ways that fit their communicative needs" (p. 95). This means that translanguaging is more than simply shifting between languages; built on Cummins's idea of interrelation between languages (2007), the process is characteristic of bi- and multilinguals who, for the purposes of comprehension and communication, simultaneously use their whole linguistic repertoire rather than only one language (Vogel & Garcia, 2017, p. 1). According to Hélot (2011), Torres advocates for translanguaging through her story, that is, by having her characters each speak their own language, she chooses translanguaging to highlight the point of the story: "that people can communicate and work together beyond linguistic differences" (p. 59). If teachers were to use

multilingual picture books, or for that matter any other multilingual material in their classroom, translanguaging would present itself as an inevitable process that scaffolds language learning, and language contacts could become a source of creativity and not fear (Hélot, 2011, p. 58).

Using multilingual picture books as an educational material in an English classroom can result in several benefits. As Hélot (2011) explains, "they give the opportunity to monolingual students to be challenged by difference; they also provide teachers with a chance to challenge ethnocentrism and to overcome their fear of having to deal with languages they do not know" (p. 44). This means that they have the potential to weaken the hegemony of the English language and to encourage and stimulate linguistic awareness and diversity. However, another question poses itself: how will students benefit from multilingual picture books if they do not know all the languages present in it? As Hélot (2011) explains, opposed to our beliefs, young children are able to comprehend cultures different from their own and, what is more, with the help of context, pictures and the knowledge of other languages, we are able to understand what is being said without knowing every word (p. 44, 61). Furthermore, knowledge of all the languages brought into the classroom is not of crucial importance because activities based on multilingual picture books would not aim primarily at teaching such languages, but at raising general awareness of linguistic diversity (Beacco et al., 2016, p. 18). Therefore, multilingual picture books offer a whole range of possible activities for children and, while at the same time giving access to various languages, they can be used for teaching L2 in parallel. By welcoming the reader into the world of literature, they can make the classroom a safe place where students and teachers "feel confident working with languages and cultures they do not necessarily know" (Hélot, 2011, p. 43). This approach could do wonders in promoting tolerance to linguistic and cultural diversity as well as motivation from an early age on – as Hélot (2008) concludes, children can learn "to grow one's own language garden, where variety makes for beauty, where patience and hard work make for bountiful harvests and where creativity means reaching out to others" (p. 12).

### **3. The study of the educational potential of multilingual picture books**

#### **3.1. Aim**

As mentioned earlier, no research has so far been done on the educational potential of multilingual picture books. Therefore, this study was of an exploratory character and it aimed to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are students' attitudes to using multilingual picture books in an EFL classroom and what they think can be learned from such material?
2. What are teachers' attitudes to such classroom material – would they use it themselves and for what purpose?
3. According to elementary school English teachers, what goals prescribed in the English language curriculum could be met using multilingual picture books, that is, what parts of the language curriculum do multilingual picture books fit in?

#### **3.2. Participants**

The study was conducted with 63 sixth-grade pupils who were divided into two groups. The first group included 44 pupils who were learning English as their first foreign language at school, and the second consisted of 19 pupils with English as their second foreign language. The pupils could have been learning various L3s at that moment, or some might only have been bilingual; this information was collected through a questionnaire, but was not expected to affect the results of the study significantly. Therefore, all the pupils in the class were able to participate in the study, regardless of their linguistic repertoire.

In the first group with 44 pupils, girls made for 45.45% and boys for 54.55% of the group, while the average age of the group was 11.86 years<sup>1</sup>. All of them spoke Croatian as their mother tongue, and English as their L2. The average length of learning English was 6.43 years. Thirty-six (81.82%) pupils were learning an additional foreign language aside from English, majority of them German at school (91.67%), while some of them (13.89%) were

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that, as will be seen in the data, some of the pupils' answers are typical for their age, that is, children start puberty around this age, which greatly affects their interests, attitudes and, also, the answers they provided.

learning three or more foreign languages. The choice, percentage and length of learning of all FLs other than English, among the 36 pupils, are shown in the chart. As only 20.45% of all the pupils in the group chose to learn some other foreign language (aside from German), the level of linguistic diversity of the group was not very high. However, it is surprising that they have chosen between as many as five different languages, since none of them can be learned at school.

Table 1: Linguistic diversity of the first group of pupils (for languages beyond English)

Choice of additional foreign language	Number and percentage of pupils learning the language	Average length of years of learning
German	33 (91.67%)	2.9
Spanish	3 (8.34%)	max 3
Italian	2 (5.56%)	?
Slovenian	2 (5.56%)	5.5
French	1 (2.78%)	2.5
Russian	1 (2.78%)	8

The second group of pupils consisted of 19 pupils who were learning English as their second foreign language, while their first FL was German. This means that at the time they were in their third year of learning English at school. In this group girls made for 73.69%, while there were only 26.31% boys. The average age of the group was 11.89 years. Since this group was smaller, the level of linguistic diversity was considerably lower, as can be seen in Table 2. Unlike the first school, this one offered three foreign languages: English, German and French. However, in this group only one student chose to learn a third foreign language at school, and only one other learned a third foreign language, in this case Portuguese (at home with her sister).

Table 2: Linguistic diversity of the second group of pupils

Choice of foreign language	Number and percentage of pupils learning the language	Average length of years of learning
German	19 (100%)	6.1
English	19 (100%)	3.16
French	1 (5.26%)	3
Portuguese	1 (5.26%)	0.25



The second part of the study included 30 English language teachers. Only 6.67% were men, and 93.33% were women. Five of them worked in private language schools (16.67%), however, they all taught to children who were in elementary school. Their average working experience was 20.1 years, and their age and language repertoires are shown in the charts.

Table 3: Age groups of teachers participating in the study

Age group	20-40	40-50	50-65
Teachers	5 (16.66%)	17 (56.67%)	8 (26.67%)

Table 4: Language repertoires of teachers participating in the study

Choice of foreign language	Number and percentage of teachers speaking the language
English	30 (100%)
German	13 (43.34%)
Italian	12 (40%)
Spanish	4 (13.34%)
Portuguese	2 (6.67%)
French	1 (3.34%)
Czech	1 (3.34%)
Swedish	1 (3.34%)

### 3.3. Instrument and procedure

The study was done using the aforementioned multilingual picture book by Leyla Torres, *Subway Sparrow*. For the purposes of this study, an audio version of the book was recorded with proficient speakers of the languages, and a short movie was made with pages from the picture book to accompany the audio track for easier comprehension.

The movie was played to the pupils twice (with subtitles in the original languages), but they were not told what the languages in the story are. Afterwards each pupil was given a short task: among a list of ten words from the story, with all three languages mixed, they had to try to recognize the language, provide the translation of each word and explain how they managed to do so, that is, if they had already known the meaning of the word or have learned it by listening to the story. After the activity, pupils were asked to fill in a questionnaire consisting of two parts. The first part collected basic personal information: age, gender, which

languages they have been learning and for how long. This was followed by the second part with yes/no and open-ended questions about the activity and the story:

1. Did you like the activity? Why/why not?
2. Did you have difficulty deciphering the meaning of the words? Which were the hardest?
3. Did you have difficulty understanding the story? Which part was most difficult?
4. Were you able to recognize the languages? Which one was most difficult?
5. Would you like to read/listen to stories like this more often in class? Why/why not?
6. What did you learn out of this story?
7. Would you like to learn any of the languages from the book? Why/why not?

The second part of the study included teachers: the same movie was played to several elementary school English teachers, along with the activity presented. They were asked to fill in a different questionnaire. The first part again collected background information: gender, age, linguistic repertoire (what languages they speak and what is their self-assessed level of knowledge), years of teaching experience and which classes they teach in. The second part consisted of several questions:

1. Do you usually use other languages besides English in your classroom?
  - a. If yes, which ones (Croatian or any other)?
  - b. If no, why not?
2. Do you allow your students to use any other languages aside from English in the classroom? Why/why not?
3. Did you like the activity? Why/why not?
4. If similar material was available to you, would you use multilingual picture books in your classroom? Why/why not?
5. Do you think this story has any educational value? If yes, what is it?
6. Could you provide some other ideas of activities based on multilingual picture books that you would use in your classroom to meet some of the goals prescribed in the curriculum for the English language?

### ***3.4. Results and discussion***

When the picture book, i.e. the movie was played to the group, the overall impression was that the children were surprised, intrigued and they generally liked it. The atmosphere

was positive, children excitedly commented and discussed with one another what the languages were and what the people were saying. The data showed that almost two thirds liked the multilingual picture book, that is, 65.9% (29 pupils who will be referred to as group A1) would like to read or listen to such material more often in class. Their explanations as to why they would like to do so are very interesting and revealing: as many as 51.72% recognized the possibility of learning something new, new languages or new words. One student pointed out that "they could learn a lot from such stories", while another stated that "it is interesting listening to other languages". This goes to show that children are in fact interested in languages, particularly when directly faced with new ones. In any case, schools should use that to their own advantage and give children the opportunity to learn and not just hear more foreign languages. Moreover, more than half of those pupils had no difficulty in understanding the story: 48.38% stated that it was not difficult, 10.34% said "not really", and 6.9% stated it was "not very/too difficult". Only 24.14% of those who liked it had some difficulty in understanding the story, but only two pupils (6.9%) explicitly said that it was difficult; others described it as "a little difficult" (3.45%), "so-so" (3.45%), "difficult in some parts" (3.45%), and one student even said that it was "difficult enough" (3.45%). However, even those two pupils to whom it was difficult to understand the story said they would like to have multilingual picture books in class more often (it should be noted that one only wanted it because he "would not have to think or write much"). As expected, the comprehension difficulties arose in parts of the story where the unknown languages – Spanish and Polish – were used. More than half of the A1 group (58.62%) pointed out the Spanish and Polish parts (or the parts when everyone spoke together) as most difficult. Interestingly enough, 27.59% of the A1 group said nothing was difficult or did not point out any part of the story as representing special difficulty. On the whole, these data show that children are able to understand even the languages they do not necessarily know, with the help of context and pictures, and that even if it is somewhat difficult, they can still recognize the potential of being exposed to a variety of languages. This can also be seen by looking at data collected through questions about the activity.

In the A1 group, majority of the pupils (86.2%) liked the task; 40% liked it because it was "interesting" or "fun", and 13.34% because "it was different from what they usually do in class". Others mainly liked it for reasons connected to learning languages: 26.67% stated that they "learned new words", and 20% recognized that they "can learn (about) new languages"; some also mentioned they "like learning other languages" (6.67%), "want to know as many languages/words as possible" (6.67%), and that the activity "might get them interested in

those languages" (6.67%). On the other hand, those from the A1 group who did not like the activity (13.8%) mostly did not like it because they "didn't know a lot of the words" (75%). These answers point to a completely different problem caused by our schooling system. Even though it was stressed to the children multiple times during the activity that there were no *right* or *wrong* answers, they were still preoccupied with answering everything correctly during the whole activity. When they were not sure or did not know the *correct* answer, they did not like it. Unfortunately, this is something brought about by our school policies: we have raised children whose primary goal is to answer correctly. This kind of thinking leaves no place for imagination and creativity, even though languages are actually based on creativity – it is by use of language that we form out thoughts and create sentences. Without creativity, learning a language is no different than learning mathematical operations. If teachers used activities similar to this one more often, children would learn and get used to thinking outside the box and to using and combining their general knowledge of all subjects. Moreover, not constantly chasing the correct answers would make the learning process more comfortable and enjoyable for all.

Close to a third of the whole group, more precisely 31.82% did not react to the multilingual picture book positively (those 14 pupils will be referred to as group A2). While in the positive A1 group there were no particular gender differences, the negative A2 group is predominately led by boys (64.29%). When asked why they would not like to read such picture books more often in class, more than half of the pupils provided answers such as: "they are boring" (28.57%), "they are not interesting" (7.14%), "I don't like them" (14.28%) or "I don't feel like it" (7.14%). These results may be the reflection of the age of the pupils who were entering puberty and had such attitudes towards most things in life. The issue is again confirmed if looking at questions about the difficulty of comprehension. In the negative A2 group, 50% of the pupils had no difficulty understanding the story ("It wasn't difficult" – 35.7%, "it was easy because we had pictures – 7.14%, and "it wasn't that difficult" – 7.14%). This clearly shows that their negative attitudes were the result of their age, rather than real dislike of the picture book. More useful are a few answers that touch upon the aforementioned problem of negative attitudes being shaped by lack of knowing the correct answer: "I don't understand half of it" (7.14%), and "it's too complicated to understand" (7.14%). As expected, there were no differences between the two groups on the question of the most difficult part to understand; pupils from the A2 group also had most difficulty with languages other than English (64.29%). It is also no surprise that most of the A2 pupils disliked the activity (64.29%), however, the reasons are similar and point to already mentioned problems: lack of

interest due to age ("it's boring" – 55.56%) and the pursuit of the *correct* answer ("I didn't know/understand the words" – 22.23%). One answer was interesting, though – one pupil could not decide whether they liked the activity or not; as explained, "it's fun, but I didn't know a lot of the words so I felt embarrassed". Again, a perfect example of how fear of making a mistake can form negative attitudes towards language learning. Similarly, one pupil could not decide on whether they would like to use multilingual picture books more often in class. The explanation was similar: "they are fun, but difficult to understand".

In total, when looking at the whole group of 44 pupils, almost all of them (90.9%) recognized the potential in such material when asked what they had learned from the picture book that class. Interestingly, 61.26% explained that they "learned new words/languages", while others noticed that "they can communicate with others regardless of the language" (6.82%), "that we should help animals/people" (4.54%), and "that there are similar languages" (2.7%). Furthermore, it can be concluded that multilingual picture books can have a positive influence on children's motivation to learning additional foreign languages, since 72.7% of the pupils stated that they would like to learn some of the languages from the story. Their explanations reveal that children are well aware of the importance of knowing several foreign languages: 16.6% stated that "the more languages you know the better", while another 12.5% remembered the saying "your value depends on how many languages you speak" (p.a. *Vrijediš koliko jezika govoriš.*) On the other hand, 27.3% of the group would not like to learn additional languages, and their reasons are somewhat worrying: 16.67% think that "English is enough" for them, and others say that "English is most interesting and is used in almost every state (8.33%), that "it would be too much" (8.33%), or that they "don't need it" (8.33%). Once again, this points to the dominant position of the English language and the negative attitudes it can cause towards other languages and linguistic diversity in general. If children were introduced to more authentic communicational situations, as they could be using multilingual picture books, they could realize how important multilingualism is in life.

The second group reacted to the multilingual picture book slightly less positively. They did not show much excitement or interest, although there were still some minor discussions on the unknown languages in the picture book. Nevertheless, more than half of the group, more precisely 57.9% would like to read/listen to multilingual picture books more often in class (those 11 pupils will be referred to as group B1). Arguments in favour of multilingual picture books are similar to those of the A1 group: "they are interesting/fun" (36.4%), "I could learn new words/languages" (27.3%), "because that's how I gain new

knowledge" (9%). Again more than half of the group (54.55%) had no comprehension difficulties and only 3 pupils clearly stated that it was difficult for them to understand the story. There were also no major differences in parts of the story described as most difficult – these were again the Spanish and Polish parts. Similarly as in the A1 group, 72.7% of the B1 group liked the activity, and their answers were also alike: 37.5% said it was "interesting or fun" and another 37.5% that they could learn new languages/words or something new in general. However, differences were recorded in the explanations of the three pupils (27.3%) who disliked the activity. In this case the only reasons they provided were: 1) "I didn't understand the point of the story" (33.3%); 2) "It's too hard" (33.3%); and 3) "It's boring" (33.3%). Surprisingly, none of the answers pointed to their fear of making a mistake and they were generally more relaxed in doing the exercise. Both groups were questioned in the same conditions and were aware that the correctness of their answers was not important. The differences can be explained by the fact that every teacher has their own teaching style, so it is perhaps the case that the second group's teacher creates a more open and acceptable atmosphere where the pupils feel more relaxed and free to share their opinions and think outside the box.

Contrary to the first group, a larger number of pupils in the second group reacted negatively to the picture book: 42.1% would not like to use multilingual picture books in their English classes (the 8 pupils will be referred to as group B2). Although gender differences in the B2 group were again present (this time there were more girls), the whole second group predominantly consisted of girls, so no inferences can be made on the issue. More important are their arguments against multilingual picture books, which, as expected, are comparable to those of the first group: to some it was boring and uninteresting (50%), while others could not understand it (25%) or it was too difficult (12.5%). However, group B2 had more comprehension difficulty when compared to the A2 group. This time more than half of the group said it was hard for them to understand the story (50% explicitly said "yes", and 12.5% pointed out it was "hard to understand everything"). Interestingly enough, only 25% listed this as a reason for disliking the picture book. No differences were recorded between the A2 and B2 group regarding attitudes towards the activity itself: 62.5% did not like it, because they did not know or understand the words (60%), while only 37.5% liked it, because "it was fun" (33.3%) and they learn new languages that way (33.3%).

On the other hand, the second group did not seem to recognize the educational potential of the picture book to such degree. Only half of the group thought that they had learned something from it: 47.4% said they "learned new words/languages" and 5.3% that

they learned "how to tell languages apart". Surprisingly, 21% of the pupils stated they had learned nothing from the story, and the same percentage provided no answer. However, these answers should not be taken into deeper consideration due to the aforementioned issue with the participants' age. Same attitudes were recorded when 36.8% of the group explained they would not like to learn more languages because "that would be too hard" (42.9%), they "don't like them" (14.3%), learning languages is boring and they don't have time for it (14.3%) or they "don't feel like learning" (14.3%). Nevertheless, those who would like to learn some of the languages from the picture book (57.9%) again provided insightful explanations that show they understand the importance of being multilingual ("so I can speak the language if I visit the country" – 18.2%; "if I meet a tourist who needs help" – 9%; "I want to know other languages as well" – 9%).

The data collected in the first part of the study clearly show that education on linguistic diversity is still underdeveloped. Although a large number of the participants were aware of the importance of learning additional languages, there was also a considerable number of those who thought English was enough. It is also evident that children recognized the educational potential that multilingual picture books offer, such as opportunities for exploring other, less known languages. On the other hand, some of the children did not like the picture book or the activity because they were not able to provide correct answers, which revealed an issue with the educational system in general. It seems that children are no longer to discover and explore things on their own, but are simply given facts and answers to memorize. However, occasional use of multilingual picture books could contribute to resolving the issue and teaching children the importance of being creative. It is important to notice that no significant differences were noticed between the two groups of pupils. Therefore, it can be concluded that the choice of pupils' L2 had no effect on their attitudes towards the multilingual picture book.

Contrary to initial expectations, all the teachers use Croatian in their classrooms, and some even use other languages, such as German (13.34%), Latin (10%) or Italian (6.67%). More surprisingly, as many as 96.67% allow their student the use of Croatian. The reasons for these practices are numerous: because pupils sometimes cannot express themselves in English (26.67%); teachers use it to explain grammar, words or give instructions (23.34%), to help some pupils who have learning disabilities (10%), to check comprehension (6.67%) and even to create a positive atmosphere, boost motivation and enhance learning (3.34%). On the other

hand, only one teacher (3.34%) does not allow their students the use of Croatian, but unfortunately has provided no explanation other than the fact that "they need to speak English the whole time". These findings show that teachers indeed see the usefulness of using L1 in their EFL classrooms. However, only a few of them use other languages in their classes.

As expected, all the teachers recognized the educational potential of multilingual picture books and they would all use such material in their classroom were it available to them. Many thought that "it would bring freshness and creativity to their classes" (25.71 %) and that their student "would like such material" (14.29%). Other would use it because some of their students are minority members (5.71%), or "to stimulate *out of the box* thinking" (5.71%) and the use of skills and knowledge of different subjects (5.71%). Teachers were asked to identify the educational value such material has, and their answers prove the potential it carries. A number of them explained that the story teaches children about cooperation, unity, moral values and importance of helping others (25.71%), as well as tolerance and positive attitudes towards *others* (14.28%); some saw the potential to teach children about multiculturalism (14.28%) and importance of being multilingual (11.42%); others thought children could see that not knowing a language should not be a communicational barrier (17.14%) and could prepare themselves for using the language in real-life situations (2.85%). This shows that they are aware of the modern societal changes and the effects they bear on educational goals – the educational values they mentioned are precisely those at which plurilingual approaches aim. Teachers were also asked to comment on the activity which was given to the pupils. Once again, they all liked it, for various reasons, e.g.: it stimulates ingenuity, thinking and problem solving skills (17.14%), it "encourages students to make connections and think logically" (8.57%), and it increases multicultural and multilingual awareness and motivation (14.28%). According to these answers, it seems that teachers are also aware of the existing issues in the educational systems concerning the lack of creativity and problem solving skills, and that they liked the activity precisely because they saw the potential it has to change the situation. Namely, it appears they recognized multilingual picture books as a fresh, new type of material that would prompt new ways of thinking and learning.

Finally, teachers were asked to provide some ideas as to which goals prescribed in the curriculum for the English language could be met using multilingual picture books. Seeing that 16.67% of the teachers work in private language schools which do not follow the state curriculum, the data collected in this question was divided into two groups and analyzed accordingly. Among the elementary school teachers, 76% listed ideas and ways to meet some



of the prescribed linguistic aims, 36% realized they could teach pupils about culture, and 32% found ways to implement educational aims. Their answers are shown in Table 5. As the greatest number of ideas were linked to linguistic aims (76%), it is visible that multilingual picture books can be used not only for developing multicultural and multilingual awareness, but also for teaching English: vocabulary, comprehension and communication skills, and even new grammatical structures. This actually shows that all categories of goals and aims prescribed in the curriculum (e.g. lexical, grammatical, linguistic, cultural, intercultural, etc.) can be met using multilingual picture books in an ESL classroom.

Table 5: Teachers' ideas on the use multilingual picture books in class

Linguistic aims (76%)	Cultural aims (36%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teaching vocabulary (26%)</li> <li>• teaching about language: etymology, similarities, intonation and <i>colour</i> of sounds (21%)</li> <li>• teaching and practising grammatical / linguistic structures (21%)</li> <li>• speaking, communication, role-play (16%)</li> <li>• reading and listening comprehension (16%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• on the occasion of the European Day of Languages (12%)</li> <li>• interculturalism and teaching about the culture of various countries (12%)</li> <li>• multiculturalism (12%)</li> </ul>

  

Educational aims (32%)	Other ideas (20%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• helping others, cooperation, positive attitudes towards the <i>other</i>, tolerance and empathy (32%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• multilingualism and motivation to learn languages (12%)</li> <li>• developing learning strategies and connecting different subject matters (4%)</li> <li>• developing multitasking skills (4%)</li> </ul>

The other group of answers was collected from five teachers working in private language schools. Even though they follow curricula different from the one prescribed by the state, the answers they provided were quite similar. However, differences are evident in the importance they attach to certain goals. Private language teachers focused more on knowledge about

language (60%) than knowledge of language (40%), as can be seen in the chart. Furthermore, more of their ideas are concerned with teaching about culture (60%), which is not surprising since curricula in private language schools are more easily subjected to change and can quickly adapt to new societal needs and demands.

Table 6: Private language school teachers' ideas on the use of multilingual picture books in class

Linguistic aims (100%)	Cultural aims (60%)	Educational aims (20%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>identifying the languages, finding similarities and differences between them, comparing the languages and learning how to compare sounds (60%)</li> <li>use of imperatives in several ways (20%)</li> <li>understanding the story from context (20%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>finding similarities in cultures, their customs and countries; doing projects on different countries (60%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>developing empathy towards the weaker ones (20%)</li> </ul>

The ideas and comments the teachers provided indicate that English teachers in Croatia are aware of the imperfections in the educational system, and their enthusiasm about the picture book shows that they are ready to embrace changes in language teaching. Even though they were not acquainted with the multilingual picture book, they all distinctly recognized its educational potential and provided examples illustrating the benefits and advantages its use could bring. The data show that teachers have a positive attitude towards such material and are open to introducing other languages into their classrooms. What is more, it also shows that multilingual picture books can be used for various purposes: firstly, most teachers would use it for practising existing and acquiring new linguistic knowledge, learning about etymology, how languages work and developing comprehension and communication skills. Secondly, they could educate children on different cultures and the differences that exist between them. And finally, teachers confirmed that, aside from educating children on cooperation, tolerance, acceptance and importance of culture, such material could also be used to teach children about the importance of multi- and plurilingualism and to motivate them into learning additional languages.

### ***3.5. Conclusion***

The developing heterogeneity of the modern society is causing significant changes to language practices: as we come into contact with a greater number of languages, former bilingual language practices are starting to change. Additionally, with the appearance of increased multi- and plurilingualism, past language education policies are also proving to be inadequate. Knowing one foreign language – in most cases English – is no longer enough to accommodate to the present diversity of cultures and societies and to facilitate acceptance, tolerance and cooperation. Therefore, language education is assuming new tasks: knowledge of a language should now be accompanied not only with knowledge about language, but with knowledge about general language principles. It also entails educating children on linguistic diversity and motivating them into exploring different languages. Aside from educational approaches such as language awareness or plurilingual and pluricultural education, small steps could be made through the use of multilingual picture books. This study explored the educational potential behind the use of such material in EFL classrooms and students' and teachers' attitudes to bringing more languages into their classrooms. The data collected clearly show that attitudes to multilingual picture books are generally positive and that teachers as well as students recognize the educational potential and advantages they offer. Although the study was exploratory, it is hoped that teachers involved in the study, as well as those reading about it, will embrace the idea of using multilingual picture books in their EFL classrooms in order to welcome children into the world of languages, its wealth, beauty and power.

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## 5. Summary

Ovaj je rad istraživačkog karaktera i bavi se obrazovnim potencijalom višejezičnih slikovnica u učionicama engleskog kao stranog jezika te stavovima učenika i profesora prema takvim materijalima. Istraživanje je provedeno na 63 učenika i 30 profesora, a podatci su prikupljeni putem upitnika. Rezultati istraživanja pokazali su da učenici i profesori imaju pozitivne stavove prema višejezičnim slikovnicama i da obje grupe prepoznaju obrazovni potencijal i prednosti koje takav materijal nudi. Nadalje, zaključeno je da se višejezičnim slikovnicama mogu ostvariti razni kurikularni ciljevi: od jezičnih, kulturoloških i odgojnih, do motiviranja djece za učenje dodatnih stranih jezika.

Ključne riječi: *višejezične slikovnice, višejezičnost, višejezično obrazovanje, Subway Sparrow*

## 6. Appendix

### 6.1. Questionnaire for pupils

Prepoznaješ li na kojem su jeziku ove riječi iz priče? Pokušaj odgonetnuti jezik i značenja riječi iz priče i navedi kako si to uspio/uspjela (znam od prije / iz teksta priče).

	Koji je ovo jezik?	Što misliš da ta riječ znači?	Kako znaš? Zaokruži
sombrero			ZNAM OD PRIJE / IZ PRIČE
pajarito			ZNAM OD PRIJE / IZ PRIČE
scarf			ZNAM OD PRIJE / IZ PRIČE
corre			ZNAM OD PRIJE / IZ PRIČE
wróbelku			ZNAM OD PRIJE / IZ PRIČE
sombrilla			ZNAM OD PRIJE / IZ PRIČE
parasolem			ZNAM OD PRIJE / IZ PRIČE
apaszka			ZNAM OD PRIJE / IZ PRIČE
subway car			ZNAM OD PRIJE / IZ PRIČE
do widzenia			ZNAM OD PRIJE / IZ PRIČE



1. Koliko godina imaš? \_\_\_\_\_
2. CURA / DEČKO (zaokruži)
3. Koje jezike znaš govoriti? Koliko dugo ih učiš?

JEZIK

KOLIKO DUGO GA UČIŠ?

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4. Da li ti se svidio zadatak odgonetavanja jezika i značenja?

DA / NE (zaokruži)

Zašto?

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5. Da li ti je bilo teško odgonetnuti značenja riječi? Koje su bile najteže?

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6. Da li ti je bilo teško razumjeti priču? Koji dio je bio najteži?

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7. Jesi li mogao/la prepoznati jezike? Koji je bilo najteže prepoznati?

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8. Bi li htio/htjela češće čitati/slušati ovakve priče na satu?

DA / NE (zaokruži)

Zašto?

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9. Što si danas naučio/la iz ove priče?

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10. U knjizi se govore tri jezika: engleski, španjolski i poljski. Bi li želio/la naučiti još neki od tih jezika osim engleskog?

DA / NE (zaokruži)

Zašto?

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## 6.2. Questionnaire for teachers

*Zahvaljujem Vam što ste pristali sudjelovati u ovom istraživanju. Podaci prikupljeni upitnikom bit će anonimizirani i koristit će se isključivo u istraživačke svrhe.*

1. Dobna skupina      20 – 40    40 – 50    50 – 65
2. Spol              M / Ž
3. Koje jezike govorite? Procijenite razinu poznavanja svakog jezika.

JEZIK	RAZINA
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

4. Koliko godina radnog iskustva u struci profesora imate? \_\_\_\_\_
5. U kojim razredima držite nastavu Engleskog jezika? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Koristite li inače druge jezike osim engleskog na satu?

a. Ako da, koje (hrvatski ili neki drugi)?

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b. Ako ne, zašto?

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7. Dopuštate li svojim učenicima upotrebu nekog drugog jezika osim engleskog u učionici? **DA / NE**

Zašto?

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**Zamolila bih Vas da pozorno pogledate slikovnicu i poslušate tekst u trajanju od 2 minute.**

8. Nakon slušanja priče, učenici dobivaju zadatak odgonetnuti jezik i značenje nekoliko riječi iz priče te moraju navesti što im je u tome pomoglo (prethodno znanje ili sama priča).

Sviđa li Vam se taj zadatak?

**DA / NE**

Zašto?

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9. Da Vam je sličan materijal dostupan, biste li koristili višejezične priče u svojoj nastavi?

**DA / NE**

Zašto?

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10. Mislite li da ovakva priča ima edukacijsku vrijednost? Ako da, kakvu?

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11. Biste li mogli navesti neku ideju/primjer za način na koji bi se višejezična slikovnica mogla koristiti u Vašem radu u razredu u svrhu ostvarivanja nekog od ciljeva navedenih u Planu i programu?

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