



Introduction

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I'm very glad to welcome you to the final Conference of the European project TALES at home – Talking about Language and emotions at home.

For two years 7 partners have worked, in close contact with multilingual families, to develop the instrument that will be presented today.

Working with partners from different regions in Europe was essential to this project. Multilingualism differs from context to context and it was important to understand this diversity: new and older migrations, contexts with or without legal regulations concerning minority languages, one or more official languages etc.

Why focusing on families?

A first reason : Parents are among the first to introduce children to sounds and words. The family is where the first choices are made regarding the use of languages and the way in which they will be introduced. Moreover, the first feelings of attachment, indifference or dislike towards particular languages, and language learning, all begin to develop within the household.

A second reason: Currently, 24 official languages are being used in Europe. Traditionally, there have been 60 regional and minority languages, spoken by about 40 million people. Helping communities retain their mother tongues and become mobile multilinguals seems morally right, rewarding, and wise. Unfortunately, not all our political leaders agree as they see multilingualism in society as a threat to nationhood. As a result, parents receive little support in elaborating their multilingual education.

Why focusing on language attitudes and feelings?

1. A first finding is related to **language learning**

All multilingual families carry with them a great potential to support language learning.

The success of formal (language) learning (at school) is influenced by both the approach and experiences at home. The strategy that is being used, will not only influence language learning as such, but will above all have an impact on the ideas and attitudes towards the different languages and a multilingual identity in general.

2. The second starting point is linked to **wellbeing**

Family members differ in language preference and language level . They have different ideas about the language goals to achieve for themselves and other family members, while their ideas and opinions often remain implicit and vague or are on the contrary very restrictive. This influences the wellbeing of the family member and his or her wellbeing will, in turn, have an influence on language learning.

Research

These findings about language attitudes – learning and wellbeing are not new and these notions have been evaluated and analyzed at length in research.

Today, we have invited two researchers, working in the field of language development and strategies in multilingual families: Annick De Houwer and Mina Kheirkhah , whom we will introduce later.

In the research part of the project we concentrated upon multilingual families and professionals working with them.

Some preliminary words about our approach in developing this instrument.

The approach we choose for the app is called ‘User Centered Design’, which means that our procedures allowed us to integrate co-creation techniques and user feedback into the project. The two stakeholder groups, multilingual families and professionals, were constantly involved throughout the process.

Here’s an example of the first exploration of a multilingual family. The mother feels strongly about Ladin (spoken in some Valleys in Northern Italy) as her mother tongue and is very attached to it (in yellow). Her son (one generation later) clearly has a lower level of attachment to it (in green) and only draws a connection to his arm and head, indicating that he uses it for schoolwork, and to his tiptoe since he sometimes uses Ladin while playing football.

Why did we focus today on you as a professional?

Today, we have invited you all as professionals working with multilingual families in an education context: teachers, educators, therapists, social workers or medical staff.

It’s not always easy for families to bring frustrations, feelings, ideas and doubts about the language use at home to the table. Parents are too emotionally involved, children often don’t find the right words and hence discussions are avoided. Help is needed in order to bring this subject to the surface.

Take this example: mom likes to speak Spanish at dinner, but Tomas would prefer to talk in Dutch, about his day at school.

We believe that professionals involved with multilingual families, in a context of language learning and/or psychological support, are well-placed to address these issues. This tool can make the basic conditions, for a successful therapy or other educational approach, more sustainable.

Today’s program

Today we will focus on and present the research, that was conducted during this project, and the digital instrument that was eventually developed based upon our findings.

To put our work in a broader perspective, we have invited two experts external to the project:

Mina Kheirkhah is our first keynote speaker and Prof. Annick De Houwer will present us with her final reflections.

The other speakers are either part of the project as a researcher or a practitioner and they will shed some light on the research that was done in the initial stages of the project and, of course, on the tool itself.