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Alex Knoll

Kindergarten as a Bastion

On the Discursive Construction of a Homogeneous Speech Community and National Identity

Zusammenfassung: In der zweiten Hälfte der 2000er Jahre wurde in der deutschsprachigen Schweiz eine öffentliche Debatte geführt zur Frage, ob im Kindergarten Dialekt oder Hochdeutsch gesprochen werden soll. Dabei ging es aber um weit mehr als um eine Unterrichtssprache: der Kindergarten – so die These – ist Schauplatz für die diskursive Konstruktion nationaler Identität. Er gilt erstens als Garant für den Erhalt einer historisch gewachsenen Kultur und Nation. Zweitens wird eine homogene Gemeinschaft von Dialektsprecher_innen konstruiert und von Nicht-Zugehörigen abgegrenzt. Dadurch wird der Kindergarten zugleich zur Bastion gegen die Bedrohung der ›nationalen Identität‹ und der ›unbeschwertem‹ Kindheit.

Schlagworte: Identität, nationale Identität, Kindergarten, Dialekt, Hochdeutsch, homogene Sprachgemeinschaft

Abstract: In the second half of the 2000s there was a public debate in German-speaking Switzerland about whether kindergarten teachers and children in class should speak the local dialect or High German. It was about more than just the language of instruction: I argue that kindergarten is a discursive arena in which national identity is constructed. First, it is viewed as protecting a presumably historically grown culture and nation. Secondly, a homogeneous community of dialect speakers is constructed and isolated from the ›others‹ that do not belong to it. As a consequence, kindergarten is becoming a bastion in defence of ›national identity‹ and ›unburdened‹ childhood at the same time.

Keywords: identity, national identity, kindergarten, dialect, High German, homogeneous speech community

Introduction

In a newspaper article published 2010 in the Swiss *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, a member of the parliament of the canton of Zurich was quoted as follows: »Whoever wants to belong to us has to learn dialect« (NZZ 2010/12/07).¹ This short quote shows the central aspects considered in this contribution. It is about language and those who are chosen to learn it. It is about belonging to a social group, to an unspecified collective named »us«. I argue that it is about the construction of identity. In this contribution I will discuss whether, and in what way, a form of collective identity involving the membership of a nation state is being produced discursively in such propositions, and the consequences that arise.

How and in which context can the proposition cited above be possible and meaningful? It is embedded in a public and political debate around the question of whether teach-

1 All citations from newspapers were translated from German to English.

ers and children in kindergarten should speak either the local dialect – often referred to as ›Swiss German‹ – or High German. This debate – hereinafter referred to as the debate on the ›language issue in kindergarten‹ – was raised in several Swiss cantons simultaneously. In some cases it resulted in votes on education bills to regulate classroom language in kindergarten. Supporters of the Swiss German dialect opposed those of High German, and both aimed to bring their arguments into legislation and hence into classroom practice. Before this debate can be addressed in this contribution, however, the context of its emergence has to be clarified.

Traditionally kindergarten in Switzerland was a community issue, and the language spoken in classroom was the local dialect, the language children from autochthonous families usually spoke at home. Only since the beginning of the 2000s can political efforts to systematically bring High German into kindergarten classes be recognised (Landert 2007, p. 15). Prior to this, the use of dialect in kindergarten had been a simple language practice and had not required regulation. That the language issue seems to need regulation in recent times and, as a consequence, that High German is promoted as a classroom language in kindergarten, is most prominently based on the discussion of PISA 2000's language test results, and especially on the »follow-up action plan PISA 2000«, published in 2003 by the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK) (see Gyger 2007).² Within this action plan, the EDK postulated an »increased, earlier and more sophisticated use of standard German« at preschool level (EDK-Plenarversammlung 2003, p. 6). It was also proposed that the use of High German was implemented institutionally, in curricula and teaching materials at the cantonal level and according to EDK's overall language concept on the national level (EDK-Plenarversammlung 2003). As a consequence, it was established in official recommendations and guidelines and gained importance in classrooms. The canton of Zurich, to which I will refer here paradigmatically, took a leading part in this process (Landert 2007). In 2005 a new bill on public education passed a cantonal referendum. This bill not only integrated kindergarten into the system of public schools, but also defined High German partly as a classroom language. The canton's Educational Board³ would then, in 2008, have to implement this change into a new curriculum.

The debate on classroom language in kindergarten can only be understood in the light of the language situation in Switzerland, and especially of the relationship between the dialects spoken in the German-speaking part of the country and High German. There are four official languages in Switzerland: German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romanic. Four more or less sharply demarcated language areas can be assigned to these four languages, where one is always predominant. In German-speaking Switzerland, several variations of German are commonly spoken – among a number of immigrant languages, of course. The language situation is generally defined as diglossia (dialect and High Ger-

2 In German: Erziehungsdirektorenkonferenz (EDK). In Switzerland, there is no federal ministry, as the 26 Swiss cantons are mainly responsible for education. The EDK is the central institution that coordinates educational issues at the national level.

3 In German: Bildungsrat.

man) (e.g., Berthele 2010; Kassis-Filippakou/Panagiotopoulou 2015). In addition to High German, which is the official written language, regional and local dialects coexist as spoken and sometimes written languages of everyday life.⁴ The dialects differ first of all by geographic region, and to a lesser extent by social space and social structure (Siebenhaar 2004). In alpine areas there are numerous differences between dialects with very local significance, but these differences are overlain by tendencies to a supra-regional everyday language. When compulsory education was implemented in the 19th century, High German⁵ was fully established as the written language. Because it spread into different spheres of life, fears of the extinction of dialects emerged, especially during the period before the First World War. Since the second half of the 20th century dialects have naturally been spoken in public life, in politics, church, school and mass media, and to speak a dialect is more and more linked to identity politics (Gsteiger/Ott 2012).

The following questions are key to my research interest: how can the debate on the language issue in kindergarten be described, and to what extent is it used for the discursive construction of a homogeneous community of dialect speakers and of national identity?

First, I will locate the term *identity* using a framework of discourse analysis, and describe the empirical and methodical basis of this contribution. The analysis will focus on the public debate on classroom language in kindergarten, identifying the central discursive formations and patterns concerning constructions of identity. The results are discussed and put into a broader perspective in the last chapter.

On identity

The term *identity* basically defines the relationship of two or more objects by postulating sameness or equality between them, but this formal definition cannot be applied to real objects, such as, in this case, people and artefacts. Two individuals cannot be completely identical, and an artefact equally cannot remain the same over time, as it is subject to change and modification. Assuming that individuals can stay the same all their life or even for a short period of time, is not tenable. As far as it is designated to be used beyond the limits of formal logics, the term *identity* has to rely on something versatile and processual (Wodak et al. 2009). An essentialist understanding of identity as something static, consistent or even native must therefore be discarded. Identity is rather viewed as socially produced and constructed (Giesen 1999; Wodak et al. 2009), as a never-ending process (Hall 1996).

Referring to a collective level, identity points to one or more commonalities that are shared by a social group but not by one or more other social groups. Such commonality

4 Berthele (2004) argues that the assignments High German = written, and dialects = spoken have lost some of their clarity, in both ways: dialects are used in written conversations, while High German is spoken.

5 More precisely: the so-called Swiss High German which differs from federal German High German by numerous Helvetisms (Bickel/Landolt 2012).

can be founded in a common culture, and a commonly used language can therefore also play a crucial role. *National identity* can be viewed as a special form of collective identity. Wodak et al. (2009) suggest not treating nations as facts but as collective inventions and imaginations, following Benedict Anderson's (2006) *Imagined Communities*. Although most people do not know each other they share the imagination of a national community. To enable and ensure that, symbolic re-enactments of chosen events are needed, as most members of society could not themselves participate in them. These events need to be re-told and spread by mass media to reach the broad public (Wodak et al. 2009). A common origin in the past is constructed, and the construction of a commonly shared history, language and culture is released from breakages and discontinuities in order to make it seem congruent (Giesen 2001).

Such constructions are far from stable, however. Identity is understood as a volatile construct of discursive processes of ongoing (re-)negotiation. On the one hand, propositions and chains of propositions involved in these negotiation processes can stabilise meaning, but can vary or even dissolve it on the other hand (Wrana/Langer 2007). Identities are products of different and partly opposed discourses, practices and positions underlying change and transformation (Hall 1996). The latter cannot be situated outside, but only inside discourses, and therefore must also be produced inside them. Discursive strategies on the level of language contribute to this production by trying to fix the meaning of national identity in a historically specific manner, and by trying to avoid shifts in this meaning (Wodak et al. 2009). The production of identity has to be understood as a process that requires »discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of ›frontier-effects‹, it requires »what is left outside, it's constitutive outside, to consolidate the process« (Hall 1996, p. 3). The imagination of a common culture and language, for example, is not given per se in the long run, it constantly needs to be confirmed and reinforced discursively.

Identity is based on difference, more precisely, on marking and signifying difference. It obtains its meaning(s) *ex negativo*, in relation to a relative *other* that is not itself (Hall 1996). This other is called the *constitutive outside* to express the fact that it is a necessary condition for the *inside*. Identity can never be built from itself but depends on reference and demarcation to something other, something different. The inside therefore takes the role of the dominant and essential, whereas the outside is subordinate and marked. This dichotomy also reflects an imbalance and a relationship of power (Hall 1997). One's inclusion into identity always implies another's exclusion (Hall 1996). Differences inside the social group whose members identify themselves with an imagined community and its symbolic representations (e.g., images, narratives) are blurred, while differences to other collectives and individuals are emphasised (Wodak et al. 2009). I will be calling this *homogenisation on the inside* and *heterogenisation against the outside*.

The discursive practice of marking differences is based on characteristics of difference, however, those characteristics do not determine what differences are made relevant in a specific historical moment of time, as the ability to identify and implement them is itself subject to change in society. Ethnicity may be set and made relevant as the key characteristic of difference at one time, and belonging to a social class or language community

at another time. Wodak et al. (1998, pp. 28) note that the characteristics of difference are manifold and changeable, they can be selected from a potentially disposable bundle containing territory, language, history and culture, among other things.

Identity works by exclusion. Marked subjects, who serve as the constitutive outside, are marginalised or excluded and serve by their distinction from ›us‹ as a basis for the production of the inside. They can return from their marginalised or excluded positions and again threaten the constructions of identity (Hall 1996). This results in even more practices of demarcation, inclusion and exclusion that aim to maintain and update identity constructions, and to try to establish their closure.

Wodak et al. (1998, 2009) investigated the discursive construction of national identity in Austria. In this study, which is committed to critical discourse analysis, their theoretical assumptions were empirically confirmed in several ways. The authors found that the uniqueness of the nation and the equality of its members are highlighted on different levels of discourse, blanking out intranational differences. Meanwhile a strong distinction is made from other nations, especially those that are perceived to be very similar to the own, namely Germany. The construction of identity refers to an imagined common history, present and future, as well as to a common culture. Language also plays a certain role as specific expressions (e.g., for food) are viewed as Austrian and contribute to the construction of an Austrian identity.

The study of Wodak et al. was conducted shortly before a referendum on Austria's entry into the European Union in July 1994. It was to be expected therefore that national identity would directly or indirectly be subject to media coverage, however, such expectations are not a priori given for this contribution, or at least there is no similar specific occasion as that of the Austrian case. This raises the question of whether and how discursive constructions of national identity can be given on stages that seem to be less obvious, as in the debate on classroom language in kindergarten, which may at first sight appear trivial and harmless.

The perspective of discourse analysis and the text archive

This contribution is based on a research project on the discursive production of elementary school in German-speaking Switzerland.⁶ It refers to the term *school discourse* (Brożewski/Maeder 2013), which implies an understanding of *discourse* that is located thematically and in schools, as the object of investigation (see Schwab-Trapp 2001). The term *discourse* is therefore predominantly oriented on the sociology of knowledge (see Keller 2010), and differs from the term used by Foucault (2002), which is not related to a specific topic but to the modalities of speech, for instance what can be said and what cannot be said. Assuming a school discourse means that, on a lower level of abstraction, discursive phenomena appear inside it which can be seen as parts of a discourse but do not

6 Project No. 100013_140619 / 1 of the Swiss National Science Foundation; Title: »The Representation of the Elementary School in the Swiss-German Discourse on Education«.

build a discourse completely. In a *debate*, a public negotiation of positions and arguments, different competing and complementary *story lines* go along with each other. A story line is a product of specific interpretations, linkages of argumentations and conclusions, compressed to a narrative (Keller 2010). Story lines are linked to *discursive strategies* which aim to influence discourses by preferring certain representations and interpretations, and thereby trying to provide them with legitimation (Schwab-Trapp 2001). The structure of the relationships of different story lines which are described based on an object of research, is part of a *discursive formation*. Discursive formations regulate the modalities of speaking, for example in the use of words and terms or the legitimation of a proposition, and produce the object that they address (ibid.). A *discursive pattern* is a discursive phenomenon that characterises a discursive formation across different positions in a debate and across story lines. The starting point for the following analysis is a public debate, however, the goal of the analysis is not to completely reconstruct either this debate or the political positions and arguments of its exponents, or the role of the publication organs, but to describe and characterise the discursive formation appearing *in* the debate using a framework of discourse analysis.

In the research project an extensive archive was set up containing 3'099 public documents that are thematically related to the research topic and were published between 2006 and 2010. In order to cover a certain discursive spectrum, documents from different sources were incorporated in the archive: articles from the economic-liberal daily newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ), the weekly right-wing and conservative *Weltwoche* (WW), publications of the Swiss Teacher's Organisation (*Dachverband Lehrerinnen und Lehrer Schweiz*, LCH) and the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (*Schweizerische Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren*, EDK). Relevant newspaper articles (of NZZ and WW) were identified by keyword search, and LCH and EDK documents were chosen and downloaded from their websites.⁷ Documents from the archive were selected by keywords that were related to the language debate in kindergarten. A total of 33 documents were included in the analysis.⁸ The methodical procedure of the analysis included four steps. First, definitions of problems and problematisations regarding the debate were identified in the documents and, secondly, linked to specific interpretations and narratives. Such linkages were bundled and condensed to story lines in a third step. And fourth, story lines were related to each other and discursive patterns across story lines were identified.

7 See www.lch.ch and www.edk.ch (access dates between May and November 2013).

8 Documents were added to the sample if the following keywords were mentioned: *kindergarten*, *High German* and *dialect*. Due to the thematic focus, all documents cited in this contribution were published in NZZ or WW.

The debate on classroom language in kindergarten

First of all, a public debate can be determined in the documents that are subject to analysis, about which language should be used in kindergarten classrooms in German-speaking Switzerland. This debate is characterised by different interpretations and narratives of events that are directed towards an undetermined group of addressees. These interpretations and narratives, as well as different positions and arguments, can be compressed into two main story lines dominating the debate. I will refer to them as (1) *integration by language promotion* and (2) *identity by language use*. A third story line, (3) *critique of achievement orientation*, is complementary to (2) but appears only marginally in the debate. After a short description of the first story line, the focus will be on the second (and, additionally, the third), due to the thematic orientation of this contribution.

Story lines (1) and (2) are competing for power of interpretation in the debate on classroom language in kindergarten. On the one hand, the argument that migrants should be integrated by learning a national language can be seen as a broad political consensus in Switzerland (Mateos 2009). On the other hand, discourses emphasising (national) identity seem to be a present phenomenon as well (Elliker 2014). Both story lines are highly relevant for and in the debate, but lead also beyond it, e.g., to migration and language policy (see discussion).

In the first story line (*integration by language promotion*) the question which language teachers and pupils should use in kindergarten class is discursively treated, predominantly under aspects of integration and language promotion and their specific connections. The premise is that language promotion is beneficial for the integration of children.⁹ As certain children are seen in need of integration, the promotion of language skills in class appears to be a logical consequence, and because language promotion is associated with learning High German, this language is promoted as a classroom language in kindergarten.

The second story line (*identity by language use*) is framing the question of language use in kindergarten as a question of identity. Integration and language promotion are replaced as the key aspects by the coupling of dialect and identity. Promoters of this story line demand maintenance of the¹⁰ dialect as the classroom language in kindergarten. The story line *identity by language use* is mainly based on three elements: the meaning of the dialect in distinction to High German, the fear that dialects could disappear, and references to a shared culture and identity.

In an article published in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ) about the question of classroom language in Basel, Rudolf Suter, referred to as the »author of a grammar for the Basel dialect«, was asked about the significance of dialect in German-speaking Switzerland. His answer was displayed as follows by the journalist:

9 Both terms are, as generally in most of the analysed documents, not specified.

10 To speak of »the« dialect suggests a dialectal unity that is not given as such (see Introduction). But as the descriptions in this chapter should be close to the text archive, I adopt this expression.

»Different from Germany or France it [the dialect; AK] is not the general everyday language of lower classes but is also spoken naturally and confidently by professors in professional discourses. For the children, especially from families of foreigners, it is important to notice that Swiss German [i.e., dialect; AK] in this country is a prestigious language, Suter says and regrets that the dialect is not incorporated as national language in the federal constitution.« (NZZ 2009/06/10)

The high status of dialects in Switzerland is noted with reference to their broad use in terms of social structure, and their good reputation. The last sentence of the quote additionally suggests that dialects and High German are of equal value, despite the fact that the dialect lacks official recognition. In brief, the dialect »as our everyday, first and main language« is said to be an »expression of our culture and identity« (NZZ 2008/04/29).

In comparison, High German is regarded rather sceptically, not only but also concerning its use in kindergarten. It may indeed have a certain status, but this is not to be overestimated. Its »great weight [...] in opposition to Swiss German« in particular, is being criticised (NZZ 2006/06/13). It is noted that High German is »unequally more strongly promoted in primary school compared to a few years ago« (NZZ 2010/03/19), and should not gain a greater importance even in kindergarten, because »through today's media consumption dialect speaking children have an active relationship to High German from an early age« (NZZ 2009/01/29). According to this argument there are enough opportunities to come in contact with High German in private life.

This viewpoint, aiming to strengthen the significance of dialect and diminish that of High German in kindergarten, rests on the fear of a »disappearance« (NZZ 2008/12/21) or »banishment« (NZZ 2008/04/29; 2009/01/29) of the dialect. The expression »banishment« implies on the one hand that kindergarten once was, and still is, the native sphere of dialect and has to defend its position; on the other hand it indirectly accuses other interpretations of the language issue in kindergarten of conducting a »campaign against the dialect« (ibid.) and to some extent of being relentless and merciless. By mentioning examples, a scenario of threat is established: »There are various examples of that, Low German for example« (NZZ 2008/12/21); »There are examples in Basel's neighbourhood, in Alsace and in Baden« (NZZ 2009/01/29).

That dialect is presented as threatened by High German can be seen as a discursive strategy. It works even without any need to explain the concrete circumstances of the examples. The means to ward off this scenario of threat is to declare that kindergarten, despite foreseeable losses, is a militant bastion of dialect:

»I can accept that nobody says *Binätsch*¹¹ any more«, says Ziegler [member of Zurich's cantonal parliament; AK]. Other things go too far for the former teacher of German. »My daughter-in-law, a teacher, has to fight for it that the pupils talk dialect with her in the break.« All the more dialect should at least be preserved in kindergarten.« (WW 2010/10/28)

11 Dialect word for spinach (German: Spinat).

References are also made to a common culture and its ›nativeness‹ in order to substantiate the peculiarity of dialect. These references are accompanied on the one hand by the homogenisation of dialects on the inside, and by the heterogenisation against the outside. Differences between the regional dialect of Zurich and that of Basel are, for example, rather ignored, while differences between those and the language associated with Germany (›German‹) are emphasised. On the other hand, a ›we‹-collective is constructed by the imagination of a common past and connectedness. This collective appears to be naturally given and separable from its constitutive outside, namely ›the Germans‹.

In a guest contribution in the weekly newspaper *Weltwoche*, German jet setter Gunter Sachs, reports on his immigration from Germany to Switzerland. When the author turns to linguistic differences, using the example of the imperfect, which is not used in Swiss German, the anecdotic text leads to a plea for the preservation of the dialect:

»The perfect is the basic element of the faraway origins of Swiss linguistic treasure and has to defend its position like the crossbowman. Because here the ancient wisdom counts: ›The younger the faster adopted.‹ That would be fatal!« (WW 2010/10/28)

If the children, as the author points out, speak High German in the morning in kindergarten, »they would soon come to dinner with sentences full of imperfect« (ibid.). The use of High German in kindergarten is thus constructed as a threat to the »faraway origins« that has to be repelled, as Swiss folk hero Wilhelm Tell once did (›the crossbowman‹). This newspaper article can be seen as a very explicit contribution to the discursive construction of postulated national identity. It makes its full effect by using a discursive strategy: Sachs is positioned as a German who can count as both a representative and expert of the outside, but because he has been living in Switzerland for a certain period of time he is also supposed to know the inside. Being able to compare the two countries and languages, and being, so to speak, a ›convert‹, increases the legitimization of his judgement.

Originality is not only assigned to dialect but also to the individuals who use it:

»The debate on the referendum on the value of dialect as part of the ›culture of our native population‹, as teacher Stefan Dollenmeier [member of Zurich cantonal parliament; AK] names it, will probably be emotional.« (NZZ 2010/12/07)

The expression »culture« already suggests that it is about something basic, that the question of language use in kindergarten cannot be just a technical issue to be regulated at the administrative level. The attribute »of our native population« attaches an additional component to »culture«. In a homogenising way, a reference is made to ›the‹ population as a collective, which is characterised by a common past. The originality that dialect speakers are assigned appears as natural and unquestioned, and the use of dialect appears as a logical perpetuation of a long tradition. In this way a sense of national identity is addressed, with which one automatically breaks by taking up an opposite position. On the other hand the distinction from those who do not belong to the postulated historically risen collective is strengthened by emphasising the »our«.

The border between the »we« and the others may be conquerable in principle, as the quote with which I began this contribution shows: »Whoever wants to belong to us has to learn dialect«, but the border itself and with it the distinction between inside and outside is more in the spotlight than the potential to overcome it. Although some differentiations are made between language regions inside German-speaking Switzerland, such as the dialects of Zurich and Appenzell which are said to be different (WW 2010/10/28), it seems to be more characteristic to separate language groups based on the attribute of nationality. Dialect predominantly serves as the distinction from Germany: »The dialect conveys identity to the Swiss, and the linguistic distinction to superior Germany is particularly one of the constants of Helvetian self-confidence« (ibid.). This perspective of the *Weltwoche* authors joins in with the rhetoric of praising the dialect. Identity does not seem to be constructed but historically grown and naturally given.

Constructions of difference that serve as distinctions from Germany and ›the Germans‹ can be found in different variations. The introduction of High German in kindergarten classrooms is often justified by promoters of the *integration by language promotion* story line with reference to the results of PISA tests as being unfavourable for Switzerland. Conversely, promoters of the *identity by language use* story line demand the maintenance of dialect as the primary kindergarten language with the argument that the reading skills of Swiss pupils lie »in the upper midfield and still in front of the Germans« (NZZ 2009/01/29). Thus a re-framing is performed: the overall position in the PISA-ranking fades from the spotlight, and only the comparison to Germany is claimed to be relevant.

The *identity by language use* story line that has been described so far is accompanied by a coexisting and complementary story line that appears only marginally in the debate. It can be called *critique of achievement orientation* and was introduced by a representative of the Greens Party:

»Susanne Rihs [member of the Zurich cantonal parliament; AK] argued against ›the achievement-driven rush‹ in education policy. It was just not necessary to expose kindergarten children to High German. In that case less was more.« (NZZ 2008/04/29)

It becomes apparent that the position against the introduction of High German as a classroom language in kindergarten, which is predominantly taken up by conservative politicians, can also be supported by representatives of other political fractions. However, a different story is – additionally¹² – told, where the focus is the critique of expectations concerning children's achievements. This perspective puts High German in kindergarten into the context of education policy that regards kindergarten as part of an education system full of demands and following a logic of utilisation, and must therefore be rejected.

12 The proposition in the previous quote was made in a debate in Zurich's cantonal parliament and thereby in line with the superior argument against the introduction of High German in kindergarten.

The homogenisation of the speech community and the construction of national identity as discursive patterns

As described in the previous chapter the debate on the language issue in kindergarten is mainly structured by the story lines *integration by language promotion* and *identity by language use*. Although identity seems to be most important in the second story line, it plays an important and superior role in the whole discourse. As it is to be expected based on former studies constructions of identity can be seen as a discursive pattern that is shared across the debate and across all political fractions. It says the following: that a national identity exists and that it is linked to language is not questioned by anybody in the debate, irrespective of the interpretations of the language issue in kindergarten. This can be shown in the following quote:

»One tries to understand the excitement: It is about the identity of Switzerland. Dialect is part of that identity. High German, the language of our national anthem, is apparently not for the connoisseurs of dialect.« (NZZ 2010/10/31)

In this comment an understanding of identity is manifesting which explicitly includes High German, and at the same time a critique of the understanding that only dialect is linked to identity. Apart from this differentiation it must be contested that the link between identity and the German language as such is established. The significance of the ›phenomenon‹ identity is affirmatively set (›it is about the identity of Switzerland‹) and thus it is also assumed that »Switzerland« is provided with its own, coherent identity. Apart from that, this is not a description of the debate, and different positions from inside it, but the journalist's own words and opinion in the mode of a commentary. By self-positioning it above the debate, so to speak, and the »excitement« that is going along with it, the proposition of the commentary appears to a certain degree well-balanced, neutral and fact-based.

The link between dialect and identity can also be described as a discursive pattern that is not limited to the *identity by language use* story line:

»Martin Wendelspiess, head of the office of elementary education¹³, declares both languages as important, the language of knowledge transfer and the dialect to bring about identity.« (NZZ 2010/03/19)

It is remarkable that High German and dialect are both described as languages. In relation to a description that treats dialect only as a variation of the (High) German language, the significance of dialect is being strengthened. The attribute »important« highlights this finding. At the same time a contradiction is built, assigning High German and dialect to different spheres. High German is associated with »knowledge transfer« and therefore understood as an educational language and assigned to the sphere of school. Conversely,

13 In German: Volksschulamt.

dialect is assigned to the sphere of identity. The link between dialect and identity here shows that it appears completely self-evident to discursively treat the language issue in kindergarten in terms of identity. As the head official referred to above can be identified as a representative of the *integration by language promotion* story line, his proposition obtains a specific relevance: ›if even he is confirming it‹, the link between dialect and identity remains without any challenging interpretation.

The construction of identity works not only by setting its existence affirmatively but also by practices of differentiation and distinction. Through these practices a collective ›we‹ is produced that can be separated from a ›not we‹ and from an ›other‹, respectively. From several possible criteria of differentiation in the debate on the language issue in kindergarten, nationality and national origin, respectively, are typically used. ›Foreign children‹, children with ›foreign language‹ and children with ›migration background‹ are separated from those who do not need specification because they are the unspecific and unmarked reference group: children with Swiss nationality and without a ›migration background‹. The category ›nationality‹ does not refer only to children. It is also seen as relevant in a medial representation of the collection of signatures for an initiative in Zurich to keep the dialect as classroom language in kindergarten:

»The growing number of Germans in Switzerland was not the occasion for the initiative but helped collecting signatures [a member of the initiative committee says; AK]. ›Some people who signed said they had to permanently speak High German at their workplace because their supervisor did not understand Swiss German.« (NZZ 2008/12/21)

While nationality in the section quoted above serves as a distinction from »Germans«, the ›others‹ are associated with the nation states of the former Yugoslavia in the following section: »Dialect or High German in kindergarten? Is the cultivated local idiom being gradually replaced if the youngest just learn Balkan [German] and High German?« (NZZ 2010/03/19). The choice offered here is restricted: on the one hand there is the positively connoted »cultivated local idiom«, the dialect, on the other is the negatively shaped »Balkan [German] and High German«. The negative connotation results from the adverb »just« (temporal and content-related reduction) and from the component »Balkan«. Even if the second question is shaped with a slightly polemic undertone: a homogeneous community of dialect speakers is discursively constructed here, again in the journalist's own words, promising well-balanced, neutral and fact-based reporting. This dialect community is separated from High German and its speakers as well as from a variation of the German language that appears to be barely desirable and that is assigned to »Balkan« speakers.

Discussion

Between 2006 and 2010 in German-speaking Switzerland there was a public debate about the question of whether teachers and pupils should speak dialect or High German in kindergarten classrooms. As it can be assumed based on former studies it is not only language issues that are negotiated in this debate, but national identity is discursively constructed. This can be shown empirically based on newspaper articles from German-speaking print media. On the one hand, identity is a central anchor of the debate: in one of the two dominant story lines the language issue is framed as a question of identity, speaking dialect is regarded as a guarantor for the preservation of a historically grown community and nation. Constructions of identity can, on the other hand, be determined as a discursive pattern that is above the different positions, interpretations and narratives in the debate. National identity is discursively (re-)produced using the publicly discussed question of language use in kindergarten. It thereby draws on the imagination of a common history and culture, but it is mostly language that turns out to be very useful. Language plays, as the analysis shows, a threefold role. First, in the form of the language issue, it gives rise to the debate to be rolled up and thus to principally enable constructions of identity. Secondly, in the form of dialect, it takes on the role of an indicator of one's national identity, and facilitates the view that the planned introduction of High German in kindergarten is a threat to this identity. Thirdly, identity can be produced based on linguistic means, namely written text in published documents.

The narrative of national identity seems to have great significance in the public discourse. Not only do the results of the analysis point to this, but also, for example, the fact that the opponents of High German in kindergarten in the canton of Zurich won a referendum on the language issue in 2011. As a consequence, the planned introduction of High German was prevented, and the dialect as classroom language was established by law.¹⁴ This finding is broadly in line with newer studies, such as that of Elliker in Switzerland (2014). The author reconstructs right-wing conservative discourses on national identity and citizenship that have numerous analogies to the *identity by language use* story line. National identity appears equally as threatened and in need of preservation. Elliker argues, drawing on Loch and Heitmeyer (2001), that the action contexts of national states experience dissolution of boundaries with increasing globalisation. The nation in terms of a solidary group is brought into focus (again) as a reference point. This may not be a specific Swiss phenomenon. Billig (1995) points out that in the US national symbolism is common, and therefore permanently (re-)brought into mind. The imagination of the nation builds a broad basis for thinking and action: »nationhood provides a continual background for [...] political discourses, for cultural products, and even for the structuring of newspapers« (ibid., p. 8). Constructions of national identity still seem to play a well-established role.

14 www.statistik.zh.ch/internet/justiz_inneres/statistik/de/wahlen_abstimmungen/abstimmungsarchiv.html/?vorlageid=337 (Access on July 7th 2015).

National identity, as shown in the analysis, is not only determined by references to communalities but also *ex negativo* by separating out what does not belong to it. This result is in line with the general theoretical assumptions of Hall (1996) or Laclau and Mouffe (1985) that an inside needs the differentiation from a constitutive outside to be constructed. Regarding the specific empirical case it can be argued following Kury (2006) that national unity in Switzerland in the 19th century was already produced less by a homogeneous culture on the inside rather than by distinction against the outside. The author ascribes this to the differences between the (language) regions that would have led the search for inner homogeneity to a crucial test. Speaking of ›foreign infiltration‹ may have been particularly helpful in producing a national identity in Switzerland, as potentially problematic differences inside the country could be kept in the background.

The results of this contribution suggest that the discursive strategy of distinction against the outside is still the central momentum of the construction of national identity in Switzerland. An outside is differentiated from an inside by drawing a clear line and maximising contrast. Homogenisation on the inside and heterogenisation against the outside is thus taking place: despite their striking differences, Swiss German dialects, for example, are broadly understood as a unity, called ›dialect‹ in the singular and opposed to dialectal variations from Southern Germany.¹⁵ At this point substantial differences to the results from Austria become apparent where some particular dialectal expressions may have a certain identitarian significance, but a common language norm together with Germany is assumed (Wodak et al. 2009).

Differences between the inside and the outside are thus emphasised, while those inside are blurred as far as possible. Although the characteristics of differentiation may not always be completely clear, the analysis shows that the key aspects of distinction are ›nationality‹ and ›national origin‹, respectively: ›Nationals‹ are distinguished from ›foreigners‹. The reference to dialect shows that the discursively constructed speech community includes all individuals who speak a Swiss German dialect. The debate on classroom language in kindergarten never involves other parts of the country where French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romanic is spoken; those are systematically left aside. The pride of Swiss people in their multilingualism (Berthele 2008) and the status of the other national languages is not affected by the debate, linguistic diversity can, as Duchêne and Del Percio (2014) argue, still be capitalized as a national resource in globalised economy. It is also evident that it is not about local or regional Swiss German identities. The discursively relevant practices of distinction run alongside the borders of the constructed speech community, covering all cantons in which a Swiss German dialect is spoken. It is thus about the separation, and in consequence the exclusion of ›the Germans‹ and of citizens from other nation states, namely the ›Balkans‹, from this community. A systematic differentiation between ›foreigners‹ from neighbouring states on the

15 This differentiation of dialects, which is oriented towards today's nation states, is, despite some tendencies to convergence at the national level, at least questionable. From a point of view of language history the dialect spoken in the Basel area is assigned to Low Alemannic German and therefore closer to dialects spoken in some regions of Baden (Germany) than to those spoken in Zurich or Lucerne (Gsteiger/Ott 2012).

one hand, and others associated with a ›foreign cultural background‹ on the other, as in Elliker's (2014) study, could not be determined, however, the negative connotations of »Balkan« language practices indicate, as Berthele (2008) argues among others, that multilingualism is not seen as a positive value per se but only if it involves Swiss national languages. That may be a reason why the overcoming of the monolingual tradition of instruction, as for example Kassis-Filippakou and Panagiotopoulou (2015) demand it, has not (yet) taken place.

The fact that German-speaking Switzerland is not a nation itself, but a part of the nation of Switzerland, raises the question of whether it is appropriate to speak of ›national‹ identity. I would like to plead decidedly in favour of it for the following reason. Many propositions in the analysed documents indicate that German-speaking Switzerland, being the largest part of the country in terms of surface area and population, stands in the debate on the language issue in kindergarten as a *pars pro toto* for the whole country: »The dialect conveys identity to the Swiss«, »It is about the identity of Switzerland« as well as the well-established antagonism »Swiss« vs. »foreigner«. The term ›national identity‹ thus fits quite well in my opinion, and it fits better than to speak of regional or partially national identities. Nevertheless, this ambiguity in naming what is discursively constructed reflects the fact that the references to identity may be clearly visible but are also vague, fragile and inconsistent. Their reference points vary from a not precisely determined »we« to the »culture of our native population«, and they are characterised by implications and hints that leave, as a discursive strategy, the door open for quite a large room of interpretation.

Overall it can be said in relation to the examined debate, that it is about much in kindergarten, but it is not primarily about the children. The language issue in kindergarten is the venue for a battle in discourse, a struggle for the power of interpretation, for identity and belonging, inclusion and exclusion. So far, so good, but why is this battle taking place in kindergarten? Is there a specific reason for that? In principle, and from a theoretically informed perspective, there is nothing unusual about this: the function of establishing identity is generally assigned to school (e.g., see Fend 2008), and it may be assigned to kindergarten as a part of public school as well. Beyond that general premise, it is worth taking a specific look at the connection of constructions of identity and the critique of achievement orientation given in the debate. Talking of »the achievement-driven rush« follows the critique of an education system that demonstrates excessive expectations regarding children's school performance. The maxim ›the sooner the better‹ is challenged by ›less is more‹. This form of critique operates with the implicit counter-model of kindergarten as a protected and protective space that is supposed to preserve the child from harmful influences from the outside. It stands for childhood as a socio-economic moratorium, for a play-oriented childhood which is free of factual and performance-based constraints, and for a long and sheltered childhood in the sense of a normative pattern (Bühler-Niederberger 2011). If the narrative of the nation and the critique of achievement orientation intersect, dialect becomes the representative of the protected homeland for children, and kindergarten becomes a bastion in defence of it. High German is not only a threat to national identity but through the process of ›scholarisation‹ associated

with it also a threat to a happy and ›unburdened‹ childhood. In this discursive coupling lies the potential for political capital to currently be made.

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Anschrift:

Dr. Alex Knoll
 Projektmitarbeiter
 Pädagogische Hochschule Zürich, Schweiz
 Abteilung Forschung und Entwicklung
 Forschungsgruppe Kinder, Kindheiten, Schule
 alex.knoll@phzh.ch