

Chapter 2

Building on Heteroglossia and Heterogeneity: The Experience of a Multilingual Classroom

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Abstract This chapter draws on empirical research carried out in a primary school located in a multilingual neighbourhood in Vienna where learning has been taking place in pilot multigrade classrooms for more than 10 years. The multigrade approach follows an open learning strategy inspired by Freinet pedagogics understanding heterogeneity as a resource and not as a drawback. The chapter will present examples from a research project which focusses on how learners perceive their heteroglossic linguistic repertoires and how they draw on multiple resources—modes, codes, discourses—to produce creative and meaningful texts. These texts, a multimodal classroom diary and a classroom library consisting of single as well as co-authored printed ‘mini-books’, form a core element in the open learning environment of the school.

Keywords Linguistic repertoires · Pedagogy · Multidiscursivity · Multivoicedness

2.1 Introduction

Empirical studies in the past two decades have focussed attention on linguistic practices—especially among young people in urban spaces—that have been designated by terms such as language crossing (Rampton 1995), translanguaging (e.g. Garcia 2009; Blackledge and Creese 2010; Li 2011), polylingual languaging (Jørgensen 2008), metrolingualism (Otsuji and Pennycook 2010) or described from a perspective of heteroglossia (e.g. Busch 2004; Bailey 2007). The interest in such practices is linked to phenomena of globally expanding mobility, which entail new and increasingly complex social formations and networking practices beyond traditional affiliations, for which Steve Vertovec (2007) has coined the term ‘super-diversity’. This has brought back into debate the notion of linguistic repertoire. The refer-

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ence to a linguistic repertoire results from the fact that these linguistic practices are not seen as arbitrary, nor as playful language use devoid of social context, but are instead described in relation to grounded local practices. The linguistic repertoire is not seen as stable and geographically fixed, but as fluid and flexible, as related to different social spaces and moments in time. Seen from the speakers' perspective, the repertoire evolves drawing on a broad range of earlier voices, discourses and codes, and forms a heteroglossic and contingent space of potentialities which includes imaginations and desires (Busch 2012).

In the context of school and education, speakers with a complex translocal repertoire encounter an institution which is traditionally rooted in a monolingual habitus (Gogolin 1994) and usually deploys a highly formalized language regime that prioritizes standardized language. Historically, school has been considered as a key institution to implement language policies aimed at enforcing a unitary (state) language and homogenizing linguistically diverse populations. Today, school is in many countries under pressure from ideologies that claim an exclusive position for the state language to counter the 'threat' of growing linguistic diversity linked to mobility and migration. An underlying monolingual homogenizing logic has shaped curricula, school manuals, communicative practices and classroom settings, such as teaching and learning in age groups. The same logic often also governs models of bilingual schools in which linguistic diversity takes the form of two added monolingualisms (Busch 2011).

In a pedagogic concept which recognizes translocal communicative repertoires and appreciates translanguaging as a legitimate way of expression and meaning making, formal teaching and learning situations must also be reconceptualized as open spaces of potentialities, where polyphonic voices, discourses and ways of speaking are seen as a resource and an asset. In this chapter, I will therefore first discuss Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, encompassing the three dimensions of social discourse, individual voice and linguistic code. In the empirical part, I will draw on research in a primary school where a pedagogy which understands heteroglossia and heterogeneity as resource is implemented. Taking Bakhtin's triadic concept of heteroglossia as an analytical framework, a particular focus will be on a close reading of texts produced by learners in the course of free and creative writing activities.

2.2 A Triadic Understanding of Bakhtin's Notion of Heteroglossia

The international or rather the western reception of Mikhail Bakhtin's writings is mainly linked on the one hand to the work of Tsvetan Todorov and Julia Kristeva (2002, p. 9), who introduced his thinking in the 1960s into French philosophical discourse, and on the other to English translations of his works that began to appear from the late 1970s onwards. Bakhtin's thinking has been influential in various fields such as literary studies, postcolonial and cultural studies, media studies, translation studies, semiotics and also in applied linguistics. Whereas in the beginning

Bakhtin's thoughts on the carnivalesque, and especially his notion of dialogism, received attention, more recently the Bakhtinian notions of 'heteroglossia' and 'multivoicedness' are being foregrounded in connection with linguistic diversity.

In the field of language learning and second language acquisition (SLA), it is particularly Bakhtin's notion of dialogism that provided theoretical grounding for new approaches. Swain and Deters (2007) in their overview on "'New' Mainstream in Second Language Acquisition Theory" show that in the past decade Bakhtin's work has increasingly captured the attention of SLA researchers, whereby some of them integrate Bakhtinian and Vygotskian theories of language and learning (e.g. contributions in Hall et al. 2005). Bakhtin's notions of heteroglossia and multivoicedness receive increasing attention in connection with speech practices developing under conditions of super-diversity: Rampton (1995) introduced the Bakhtinian notion of double voicing to analyse moments when speakers use someone else's discourse or language for their own purposes. Bailey (2007) stresses particularly that the notion of heteroglossia allows us to connect linguistic forms and historical social relations. Whereas from the perspective of interactional linguistics the concept of heteroglossia is mainly referred to in analysis of multilingual practices, in post-structuralist approaches heteroglossia receives particular attention when exploring the role of language in the formation of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, of multiple identifications and subject positions. Authors refer particularly to Bakhtin's understanding of a Self not as determined by socially and ideologically constructed worlds, but as developing in dialogical response to them (Pietikäinen and Dufva 2006; Kramsch 2009; Lähtenmäki 2010; Busch forthcoming).

Studies exploring heteroglossic practices often rely on empirical data from educational contexts and school environments and focus on practices among children or adolescents challenging monolingual institutional norms (e.g. Rampton 1995; Jørgensen 2008; Creese and Blackledge 2010; special issue of 'Pragmatics' 2010¹). Some authors include teaching and learning strategies allowing for and making use of heteroglossic practices to encourage student participation, to link classroom life to the social environment and to build on students' resources to enhance metalinguistic awareness (e.g. Busch 2006a; Blackledge and Creese 2010). Nevertheless, the documentation of pedagogical concepts building explicitly on translanguaging or on heteroglossic practices is still scarce in scholarly publications and mainly concentrate on specific areas such as educational materials development (Busch 2006b; Busch and Schick 2007), language learning (Canagarajah 2007), creative multimodal classroom activities (Stein 2008) and complementary schools (Creese and Blackledge 2010). In this chapter, I will focus on the example of a classroom in which students with diverse translocal linguistic repertoires learn together, where heteroglossic practices are not only present in informal settings or tolerated in formal contexts but also consciously taken up as resources, where heterogeneity and heteroglossia are recognized as pedagogical principles. In exploring these class-

¹ See different contributions in the special issue 20/4 (2010) which focusses on "how children, in naturally occurring school and neighborhood peer and sibling-kin groups across a variety of cultures and societies, socialize one another to do heteroglossia" (Kyratzis et al. 2010, p. 457).

room practices, I will rely on Bakhtin's understanding of heteroglossia which is based on the notion of dialogism, the presence of others' words in one's own utterances.

I use the term heteroglossia in a large sense, embracing the multifaceted and multilayered plurality which in Bakhtin's view is inherent to living language. Analytically, it is useful to distinguish between the notions of *raznorečie*, meaning the multiplicity of (social-ideological) speech types or discourses, *raznogolosie*, meaning the diversity of (individual) voices, and *raznojazyčie*, meaning linguistic variation or the diversity of languages² (Todorov 1984, p. 56):

- Multidiscursivity [*raznorečie*] refers to the co-presence of specific speech types or discourses that are related to time (particular epochs, periods, days, etc.) and to social worlds or spaces (nations, professions, age groups, families, circles, etc.)—to a “multitude of concrete worlds, a multitude of bounded verbal-ideological and social belief systems” (Bakhtin 1981a, p. 288). Following Bakhtin (1999, p. 121), each of these spheres develops relatively stable types of speech genres and topics.
- Multivoicedness [*raznogolosie*] specifies that multidiscursivity is “expressed [...] by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions” (Bakhtin 1981a, p. 263). For the individual speaker the word “lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes ‘one's own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention” (Bakhtin 1981a, p. 293).
- Linguistic diversity [*raznojazyčie*] finally points to the traces that are left behind in language as a result of social differentiation (Bakhtin 1981a, p. 293). The intentional diversity of speech [*raznorečivost*] “is transformed into diversity of language [*raznojazyčie*]; what results is not a single language but a dialogue of languages” (Bakhtin 1981a, p. 294). Thereby, Bakhtin (1981a, p. 295) makes no fundamental distinction between linguistic diversity within what he calls a ‘national’ language or among “several ‘languages’ that have established contact and mutual recognition with each other.”

² In today's reception, the term ‘heteroglossia’ is generally used to designate Bakhtin's concept of linguistic and discursive plurality as a whole. This corresponds to Emerson's and Holquist's terminology who translate the Russian word *raznorečie* as ‘heteroglossia’ (Holquist 1981, p. 428). Todorov (1984, p. 56), however, insists on a more differentiated understanding. He translates *raznorečie* as ‘heterology’, meaning the multiplicity of (social-ideological) discourses. In contrast, he reserves the term ‘heteroglossia’ to translate *raznojazyčie*, meaning linguistic variation or diversity, and the term ‘heterophony’ for *raznogolosie*, meaning the diversity of (individual) voices. Bakhtin himself admitted a certain penchant for variation and plurality of terms to name the same phenomenon examined from different perspectives (Todorov 1984, p. xii), but in some places there is a clear distinction between the three notions as in the following quote when he speaks about “a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices” (Bakhtin 1981, p. 262). Another source of possible confusion is related to the diverging use of the English term ‘discourse’ which in Emerson's and Holquist's translation stands for the Russian *slovo* [word, talk], in Todorov's translation for the Russian *reč'* [speech].

The idea of unitary language in the triple sense of monodiscursivity, homophony and monolingualism is intimately linked to hegemonic, centripetal socio-ideological forces “that serve to unify and centralize the verbal-ideological world” (Bakhtin 1981a, p. 270). It is expressed through the “authoritarian” or “sacred” word that “with its indisputability, unconditionality, and unequivocality” is removed from dialogue and “retards and freezes thought” ignoring “live experience of life” (Bakhtin 1986, p. 133). In the context of linguistic–ideological centralisation and unification, heteroglossia becomes a counter-strategy that functions as a “parodic antibody” which challenges and profanes the authoritarian word and brings it back into dialogue (Bakhtin 1986, p. 133). Heteroglossia as a pedagogy thus would have to adopt this critical gesture and aim at developing among all participants involved in the process of teaching and learning a high degree of linguistic awareness.

2.2.1 M2: Exploring the Potential of Creative Multimodal Text Production

The empirical research which this chapter draws on was carried out in a state primary school located in the neighbourhood of Vienna, which according to the current population census has the highest percentage of inhabitants of migrant backgrounds. The school statistics show that 87% of the learners in this primary school currently use another family language than German or in addition to German. Since some 20 years ago, besides German, mainly two further languages—Serbocroat and Turkish—figured in the school register, today under conditions of super-diversity the range of languages listed has become much broader. Also children from a nearby refugee centre attend this primary school, which results in a high fluctuation and a considerable number of so-called lateral entrants, who after having started their schooling in another medium of instruction join the Vienna classes directly in upper grades.

Within this school, our research focusses on a multigrade class named M2³, in which children from the first to the fourth year of schooling learn together in one single classroom. This class is one of the almost a hundred multigrade classrooms in Vienna where learners of different grades, ages, abilities, levels of attainment and linguistic backgrounds work together in a vertical grouping. The Viennese multigrade classes began in 1997 as experimental classes and have developed in the past decade into an important movement which understands itself as an alternative to the age grade form of teaching.⁴ Inspired by open learning approaches and progressive pedagogy models (Reformpädagogik) as developed by Maria Montessori, Célestin Freinet and others, the Vienna multigrade movement has insisted on a non-elitist orientation and has developed within the state school system. Today approximately

³ M2 classroom web site: <http://ortnergasse.webonaut.com/m2/>.

⁴ Arbeitsgemeinschaft Wiener reformpädagogische Mehrstufenklassen (2008); <http://www.mehrstufenklassen.info/>.

2,000 children between the age of 6 and 11 years attend such multigrade classes, but the growing demand cannot be met. The multigrade classrooms are allocated a number of additional teaching hours for which a second teacher comes in, and parents are invited for particular activities and considered as valuable experts and helpers. Within 3–5 years, learners can complete the primary cycle which usually encompasses 4 years. Every year approximately a quarter of the learners leave the multigrade class, while a corresponding number of newcomers join in. This flux of continuity and change facilitates the integration of newcomers into the classroom routines. The classroom remains an open social space with its own ongoing history, and heterogeneity is not seen as a disturbing factor but as a core learning principle.

The M2 follows a learning approach based on the concepts developed by the French pedagogue Célestin Freinet (1896–1966): learning takes place in co-operative processes following as much as possible an inquiry-based method; children are encouraged to bring in their own interests and curiosity. A core aspect is the so-called pedagogy of work (*pédagogie du travail*), meaning that children learn by making useful products or providing useful services (Freinet 1969). The Freinet approach is particularly associated with the creation of meaningful texts such as school newsletters, working libraries and self-correcting files produced in every classroom, originally with lead typesetting and printing press. In the M2, free and creative writing and desktop publishing are an essential pedagogical concept and ongoing activity. Computer, camera, scanner, recording devices and other multimedia equipment act as a modernized version of the Freinet printshop and as tools to implement the principle of processing a text from the idea to the distribution of the final product (Schreger 2008). For their innovative, multimodal and multilingual materials, the M2 has gained a number of Austrian and European awards. One of the creative writing activities is the digital classroom diary which has been a daily activity for more than 10 years. Through this kind of blog or chronicle, the multigrade classroom becomes a site with its own particular history. The content of the record of the day is negotiated among the learners and produced by one or several of them. Every record consists of a photograph and a short written text which is also read and audio recorded. The diary is available on the M2 web site⁵ and is printed out in two copies, one for the classroom library and one for the author to take home. The printed diary collection is a popular reading material among the learners, and the on-line version allows parents to have a glimpse of everyday life in school. Another permanent activity is the World-ABC⁶, an open Internet platform which invites learners to navigate through language(s) and pictures associated with particular terms. It is a kind of multilingual on-line dictionary with written and audio-recorded translations into a number of different languages represented in the classroom (Turkish, Kurdish, Chinese, English, Serbian). Each lexical item is accompanied by a series of different pictures chosen by the learners to represent their visual concepts of the term. Associative links lead to other terms. The World-ABC is an open platform which grows organically by adding new items, comments and pictures to the associative chains. The M2 administers the query database and edits

⁵ Classroom diary: <http://ortnergasse.webonaut.com/m2/index1.html>.

⁶ World ABC: <http://weltabc.at>.

contributions coming from Internet users. The Welt-ABC-version with German as source language today comprises more than 700 terms, the kurdi.weltabc.at with Kurdish as source language 300 (Schreger 2008).

Our research focussed on a further activity, the ‘Little Books Library’⁷, a collection of booklets in A6 landscape format written and illustrated by the learners. The booklets are easy to produce, and the equipment is always available and accessible in a special corner of the classroom. The Little Books Library, a wooden box containing the more than 400 little books that were produced since 2005, is also readily available. Learners are free to choose if and when they want to create a booklet; they are also free to choose topics and means of composition and design. The only specification is the common format. Every book consists of ten pages plus a cardboard cover and has all the visual and haptic qualities of a ‘real’ book. The bibliographic data on the cover pages contain title, name of the author and the imprint which identifies the booklet as belonging to the M2 Little Books Library. In this sense, every book is at the same time an individual creation and part of a collective work. It is printed in at least two copies, one for the author(s) and one for the classroom library. Occasionally, further copies are produced for exchange with other schools. The following section takes a closer look at one of the little books to show how learners access multimodal and heteroglossic means to tell their stories.

2.2.1.1 The Elephant and the Mouse: A Story of Displacement and of Friendship

Nemanja wrote his book “Slon i miš/Der Elefant und die Maus” [The elephant and the mouse] shortly after his arrival in Vienna. He was 8 years old when he came from a village in Serbia where he had attended 2 years of primary school. His story consists of five scenes, each of them encompassing a short text and a drawing. The text is not simply a caption for the drawings, nor are the drawings just illustrating the text; meaning is created in an interplay of both modes. Translated into English, the text reads:

One morning the elephant went for a walk (1). On his way he met a mouse (2). They became friends and decided to go to the seaside (3). When they arrived, the elephant immediately went for a swim and the mouse sunbathed (4). Then also the mouse went for a swim (5).

On the first level, the narrative tells about becoming friends. However, the analysis of the visuals reveals other, parallel storylines. In the analysis of the visuals, I follow the segment analysis approach developed by Roswitha Breckner (2007, 2010)⁸: The key element of this method is an analysis of segments which are identified by a description of the perceptual process, and of the formal elements of the construction of a picture. The interpretation focusses on thematic references deriving from specifically pictorial phenomena such as lines, light, colour, forms, foreground, back-

⁷ Some of the little books can be viewed at: <http://ortnergasse.webonaut.com/m2/kb/>.

⁸ I would like to thank Roswitha Breckner for analysing together with me this and other booklets and for her important input for a fuller understanding of the process of multimodal meaning making.

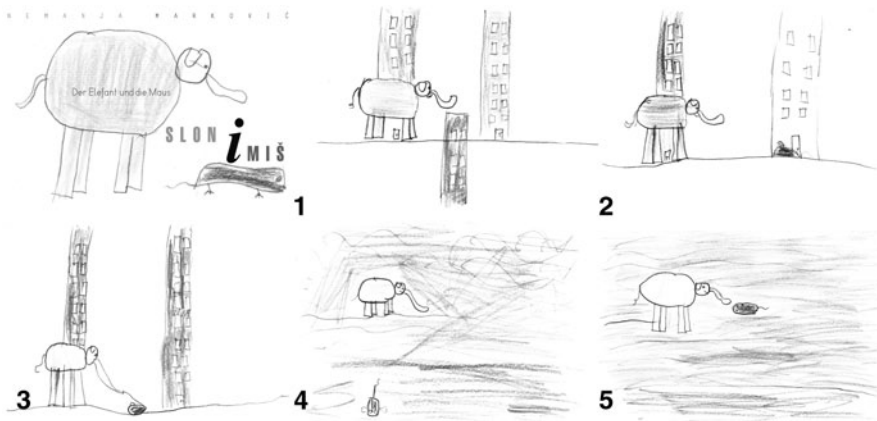


Fig. 2.1 The elephant and the mouse

ground, etc. in a relational way. The segment analysis is based on theoretical considerations about the relationship of picture and language as well as of the relationship of picture and reality. Foregrounding the perception process, the addressivity of the visual and a “responsive understanding” (Bakhtin 1981a, p. 280), segment analysis can be considered as a dialogic method which attributes an active role to the reader or beholder. In this method, elements that attract specific attention are first isolated, described in detail and then submitted to hypothetical readings of their symbolic and iconic meanings. After having traced the pragmatic context of the picture, the synthesis elaborates how meaning is made visible by and within the picture.

In the book about the elephant and the mouse (Fig. 2.1), the synthesis of different pictorial elements identified in the course of the analysis allows an additional reading of the story: The elephant is out of place, lost in the urban canyon of a big city. He is too big to enter the doors of the houses, but small compared to the skyscrapers that reach beyond the rim of the page (1). He perceives (from a safe distance) the town mouse, who is the right size for the cityscape and just comes out of a door (2). Elephant and mouse join trunk and tail—they become friends (3). At the seaside, the elephant is in the water, while the mouse rests on the beach (4). Then, both are in the water; the elephant has brought the mouse into ‘his’ element (5).

Figure 2.2 focusses on one of the isolated segments, the elephant’s head: At first the elephant looks straight ahead; his tusks are visible (1). When he meets the mouse (2) he bows down and shows readiness for interaction, the tusks disappear (3), the trunk gains in importance and the mouth becomes more and more visible and smiles (4, 5).

The analysis of the visuals and their contextualisation suggest that the author invests the elephant as the main character with emotional expression and that he narrates a story of displacement related to his own experience. To tell his story, the author borrows from known genres and topics and modifies them for his purposes: He adopts the genre of fairy tales with a happy ending in which animals represent the main acting characters. In his story, the characters are borrowed from the mouse and elephant jokes popular among children in the German speaking as well as in



Fig. 2.2 The elephant's head

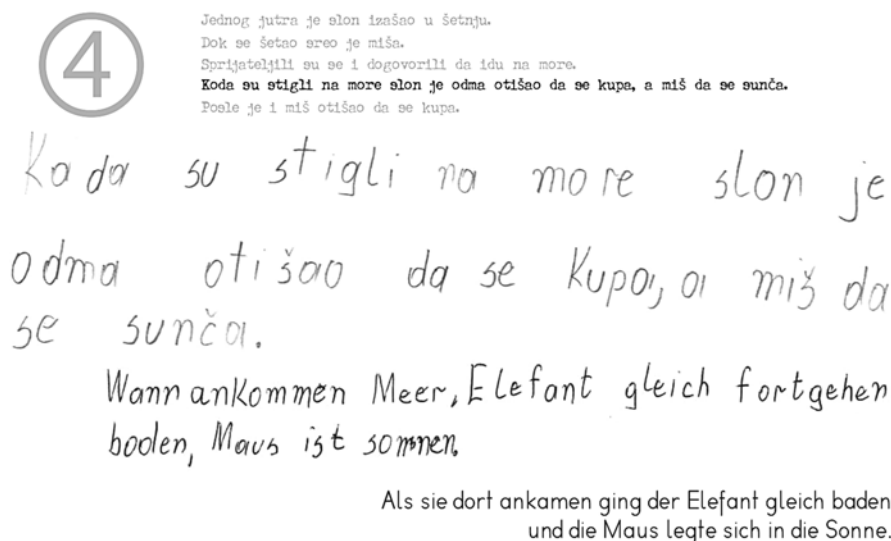


Fig. 2.3 One page of Nemanja's booklet

the Balkan space⁹. These jokes play with the difference in size between the two unequal friends. Usually, the witty mouse plays the leading part. In Nemanja's story, however, the elephant is the main character—lost in the city, which is the mouse's environment.

A closer reading of the written text reveals the co-presence of multiple voices that contributed to its production. Figure 2.3 shows one text page of Nemanja's booklet. As on this page, the text appears throughout the book in four versions. The original text is handwritten in pencil in Serbian language and the Latin script Nemanja learnt in the village school he attended in Serbia before he came to Vienna:

Kada su stigli na more slon je odma otišao da se kupi, a miš da se sunča.

The next text layer, which is in blue ballpen handwriting, gives a first translation into German:

Wann ankommen Meer, Elefant gleich fortgehen baden, Maus ist sonnen.
 [When arrive sea, elephant immediately go out swim, mouse is sun herself.]

⁹ See e.g. Maus-und-Elefant-Witze: <http://www.kidsville.de/tiergarten/witze/>.

The text gives clues as to how it was composed: In several cases, words are not taken from a daily colloquial register but from a more sophisticated one usually used in written texts (e.g. “übereinkommen”, “Freundschaft schließen”) and many verbs appear in their indicative form (e.g. “ankommen”), without the appropriate auxiliary verbs. This implies that a dictionary was consulted to work out this first translation. On the other hand, certain words indicate in their almost phonological transliteration that they were available for the translation in their vernacular Viennese form (e.g. “boden” versus “baden”). Apparently, Nemanja had some help from outside the classroom, possibly from his parents or other family members. The third text layer, the typewritten lines on the bottom of the page, were written by the teacher who reframed the above quoted translation in a more conventional German:

Als sie dort ankamen, ging der Elefant gleich baden und die Maus legte sich in die Sonne.
[When they arrived there, the elephant immediately went swimming and the mouse sunbathed.]

As the teacher does not understand Serbian himself, his German version is built on the first translation into German, the translation ‘with an accent’. The fourth text layer, the typewriting on the top of the page, was also done by the teacher who immersed himself in the ‘alien word’ of (for him) a foreign language. Typing the text in Serbian implies that he trusts the learner and is prepared to give up control. He exchanges his position of the one who knows with the part of the one who learns. The co-presence of the two typewritten versions, the Serbian and the German, signals that both are considered to be of equal value. The visibility of the four text layers in the printed version of the little book stresses the importance of the production process and the multiple actors involved in it. A chain of intertextual transformations and inter- and intralingual translations (Jakobson 1971 [1959]) remains visible and affirms the dialogic character of the creative process and the resulting work. The little book is a heteroglossic text in the Bakhtinian sense as it displays, drawing on different modes of symbolization (written, oral, visual), the interaction of different codes, discourses and voices.

Nemanja’s book ‘The elephant and the mouse’ was presented here as an example for the little books that constitute the Little Books Library. Each of these books as well as the library as a whole are an expression of the heterogeneity of the learners’ backgrounds and of the neighbourhood in which the school is located. In the following section, I will explore with reference to the Little Books Library why all three dimensions of heteroglossia—multivoicedness, multidiscursivity and multiplicity of codes—are significant when heteroglossia is implemented as a pedagogy.

2.2.1.2 Multivoicedness [raznogolosie]

Nemanja’s book is the result of cooperation between different persons. The traces of other voices are not ‘evened out’, but remain visible: Nemanja, as every author of a text, has (absent) addressees in mind whose responses he anticipates and who therefore are implicitly also present in the text—in his case probably his teacher,

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