Facing epistemic uncertainty: characteristics, possibilities, and limitations of a discursive contextualist approach to philosophy of education
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NEGOTIATING THE WORLD. SOME PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON DEALING WITH DIFFERENTIAL ACADEMIC LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IN SCHOOLS

1. Introduction
Partly because of globalization and accompanying processes of migration, educational systems are confronted with the problem of differential academic language proficiency of children within school classes. This problem is an issue of major educational concern these days. Discussants not only consider it disturbing it interferes with pupil performance, (Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Calderón, Hertz-Lazarowitz & Slavin, 1998; Eisenstein Ebsworth, 2002; Garcia, 2002; Jepson Green, 1997; Porter, 2001; Reyes & Rorrer, 2001; Thompson, 2004; Valdés, 2002; Wright, 2004), but also because it is related to problems of social prospects (Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Porter, 2001; Thompson, 2004; Valdés, 2002; Wright, 2004), and citizenship (Thompson, 2004). This cluster of problems that is related to differential academic language proficiency raises a lot of questions, including philosophical ones. Such questions may concern relations between social groups and how to assess them, the position of the individual in society, or equality of opportunity, to mention only a few examples. Philosophical questions with respect to differential language proficiency may also concern the definition of underlying concepts, that are used in formulating the problem as such, e.g. the concept of language or that of lemming. Though I realize, that both categories of philosophical questions will turn out to be interrelated, my initial interest concerns the second category. In particular, I want to investigate what implications our conceptions of learning a language have for the definition of the language-learning subject. In other words, I am interested in the definition of the human subject as related to the learning and use of a language. To that end, I will develop a conception of language acquisition, and formulate its implications for the definition of the subject as I go along. In addition, I will discuss the consequences of my results for understanding differential linguistic development of children in schools, and for dealing with the problem at the level of policy.

Starting from Ludwig Wittgenstein's 'meaning-as-use' theory, in
the next section I first introduce a conception of language acquisition as initiation in a language community. In my analysis learning a language appears as a process, in which those who undergo the process of initiation essentially play an active and also potentially renewing part. This brings us to the relevance of the experience the language-learning subject has of the 'world' - of that which is spoken about - for becoming an active participant in a language community, which I investigate in a third section. Here I find that the development of judgmental skills with respect to 'the world' constitutes an important ingredient of language-learning as well. Both dimensions of language-development - participating in a language community and developing judgmental skills - seem closely interrelated. The interdependencies of the three components that come into play in language-acquisition - subject, language-community, and world - are discussed in a following section. Here, the language-acquiring subject will appear as an intentional participant in a socially mediated process of negotiation about what will be accepted as the world. From this process, the world emerges as a conceptualized and a communicable complex of meanings, in ever temporary forms that keep being renewed in the process of communication time and again. In a concluding section, I discuss some consequences of my conclusions for the educational meaning and relevance of differential academic language proficiency, which also throws some light on current differences of opinion about which policy to take in this issue.

2. Language acquisition as initiation
Developing an idea of the language-acquiring subject requires a conception of language to begin with. Wittgenstein's meaning-as-use theory offers a good candidate that is hardly controversial in philosophy of education. Developing an understanding of the analysis of concepts Richard Peters (1966) first drew attention to this theory, and it seems hardly possible to imagine philosophy of education without it ever since. Based on a use-theory of meaning Peters also developed an understanding of initiation into language-use, however, in this case without explicit reference to Wittgenstein. More recently philosophers of education use Wittgenstein's theory in particular when dealing with problems of initiation into language and the use of language (see, for example, Hamlyn, 1989; Marshall, 1985; Smeyers, 1995; Smeyers & Marshall, 1995; Spieker, 1977).

The idea of the later Wittgenstein, that we should not understand words and their meanings as direct representations of the world of objects 'out there', excludes any conception of language-development that is based on the idea of learning to apply the right word to the right object.
Wittgenstein's (later) philosophy of language recognises a great variety of language uses (cf. Wittgenstein, 2001, § 23). In descriptive language use, reference to the world is not considered a necessary precondition for meaningful speech about the world. One of Wittgenstein's examples to explain this addresses the question how we learn words like 'pain', i.e. words that can seemingly only draw from one's own experience. Wittgenstein points out that this only is a problem as long as we use the model of 'object and designation' to understand the learning of such words. However, on closer inspection the object appears to drop out of consideration as irrelevant (Wittgenstein, 2001, § 293). Wittgenstein illustrates this with the use of the word 'beetle'. As one can only access their own experiences, Wittgenstein explains, one can at best find out in what situations - as experienced by the subject - other people seem to use the word 'beetle'. Wittgenstein: "Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a 'beetle'. No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at his beetle. - Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing. - ... That is to say: if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of 'object and designation' the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant" (Wittgenstein, 2001, §293). In the end, we do not learn the meaning of the word 'beetle' by being confronted with the object, but by being confronted with the use of the word 'beetle'.

Learning linguistic meaning seems primarily an issue of getting familiar with the conventions regulating linguistic usage. Consequently, language acquisition can be understood as a process of initiation into the customs of a linguistic community. However, this process would be misunderstood if compared to a simple transfer of the rules governing customary usage, because these rules are not such that mechanical application would be possible, or that they would guarantee correct linguistic usage. "For not only do we not think of the rules of usage ... while using language, but when we are asked to give such rules, in most cases we aren't able to do so" (Wittgenstein, 1969a, p. 25). In addition, Wittgenstein says: "The man who is philosophically puzzled to see a law in the way a word is used, and trying to apply this law consistently, comes up against cases where it leads to paradoxical results" (Wittgenstein, 1969a, p. 27; see also Wittgenstein, 2001, §198 ff.). Linguistic customs are changeable and not unambiguous at that. Wittgenstein's concept of 'family resemblances' expresses this as well. As a consequence, in learning a language the subject is not learning to more or less passively reproduce specific customs. As Jerome Bruner (1990), formulates it: "Language is acquired not in the role of spectator but through use. Being 'exposed' to a
flow of language is not nearly so important as using it in the midst of 'doing'" (p. 70). Language-acquisition requires 'doing', active participation.

Publications about differential language proficiency in schools demonstrate this idea of learning by doing as a widely accepted starting point. For example, Eugene Garcia says that 'natural communication situations must be provided' (Garcia, 2002, p. 23), whereas Elise Jepson Green thinks it important to create a "language rich environment ...with good models of English language use" (Jepson Green, 1997, p. 152), and Pedro Reyes en Andrea Rorrer recommend offering opportunities for "participation in meaningful interaction" (Reyes & Rorrer, 2001, p. 169). These authors share the assumption, that language acquisition can best be furthered directly related to actual communicative contexts. A transfer-model of language acquisition only seems implied where discussants recommend separate instruction, for example to explain grammatical aspects of language (Eisenstein Ebsworth, 2002, pp. 107-09). Similarly, in educational policy discussions some Dutch discussants (Vaessen, Hoogeveen & Stassen, 2003) argue in favor of separate classes for pupils with limited academic language proficiency in order to improve the preconditions for their school performance. Of course, such classes could make use of the principle of 'learning by doing' as well, but the idea of first improving language proficiency before concentrating on further academic achievement still separates the context of language acquisition from the context of language use.

In order to find out what this active participatory role of the subject in acquiring a language implies for our conception of the language-learning subject, we will need a sharper view of what this activity entails. In his interpretation of Wittgenstein's contribution to this issue, Paul Smeyers (1995) distinguishes two dimensions in this active participation. The first dimension follows logically from the idea, that usage does not consist in following fixed and unambiguous rules. As a consequence, the novice is faced with the task to develop his own pattern of meaning from the more or less diffuse instances of usage he encounters in a variety of contexts. As the subject is not confronted with linguistic customs as such but only with scattered instances of usage, he will have to reconstruct some version of these customs for himself from the cumulative series of linguistic experiences he is confronted with. This dimension of active subjective participation in acquiring a language results in a unique connotation, a 'personal color'" (Smeyers, 1995, p. 123), for every new word or expression an individual gets familiar with.

The second dimension Smeyers distinguishes in the active participation of the language-acquiring subject is related to whatever language is
about, to the object or situation language users attach a meaning to. To explain this, Smeyers refers to an example of Wittgenstein, discussing the question how anybody could recognise the taste of sugar as the taste of 'sugar' (Wittgenstein, 1980, §353). This also requires an activity of the subject, if only by making an appeal to his memory where the taste of sugar would be stored for comparison with future experiences. However, in reality recognition will never be as simple as that, as Smeyers emphasizes, because situations will never be completely identical - even if restricted to tasting sugar. Consequently, recognizing something as 'sugar' will not only require an appeal to memory; the subject also has to construct the situation as an instance of tasting sugar, or, as Smeyers (1995, p. 123) expresses it, he has to accomplish a "performing of the meaning" as well. The object the use of language is about is never given as such, but only results from this 'performance of meaning'.

After the preceding, language acquisition can be understood as a process of initiation in the customs of usage by way of active participation. The active contribution of the novice to this process includes the development of complexes of meaning, characterized by unique personal coloring, which will also contribute to the renewal of linguistic customs in the language community concerned (Smeyers, 1995, p. 123). In addition the novice actively contributes to the process by relating his own sensations of the 'world' to these developing complexes of meaning and language and vice versa.

The first activity of the language-learning subject - reconstructing possible meanings of linguistic expressions - primarily relates the learning subject to the present community of language users. The second activity - relating sensations to linguistic expressions - primarily relates the learning subject to the world, to the objects and situations language is about.

Though I explained above, that Wittgenstein's theory of meaning does not presuppose reference to the world as a necessary precondition for meaningfully speaking about it, a theory of the language using and acquiring subject seems to require an explanation of the relation between the subject and the world of objects in order to understand "the grammar of the expression of sensation" (Wittgenstein, 2001, §293). I will explore this relation between subject and world in the next section; after that I will be able to give a more detailed description of the way the language-learning subject is related to other language users.

3. Language acquisition as development of judgment
Though learning to use a language requires a relationship to a community of language users, paying attention to that which is given meaning to in using language, is just as indispensable for understanding the use of
language. In order to develop a conception of the language-learning subject, not only his developing ability to make use of linguistic devices is important, but also the experience - in the broad sense of the word - that is expressed while using language. In explaining his Wittgenstein interpretation, Michael Luntley elaborates on the role of this 'experience with the world' in linguistic development. Distinguishing this experience from the influence of other language users, he says: "Others help it phrase its engagement, but they are not the object of engagement except in so far as others are, of course, part of the world" (Luntley, 2003, p. 172). This developing 'engagement with the world' is an indispensable part of linguistic development that will also affect the role of the language community in the process. According to Luntley's interpretation of Wittgenstein, the use of language is "calibrated in patterns of use that manifest a grip on that which is independent of will" (Luntley, 2003, p. 135). Consequently, the wish to get a grip on 'that which is independent of will' constitutes an important source of any linguistic development.

In this view, the use of language implies an intentional turning of the subject towards the world. In this respect the language-using subject plays an active part. Luntley points out, that according to Wittgenstein's view of language, the subject can never have a direct and unmediated connection to the world. It is an attitude of the subject, crystallized into an 'attentional awareness' as Luntley calls it, which shapes the connection of the subject with the world. In other words, the way the subject focuses on the world determines the resulting 'coupling' between subject and world. According to Luntley, an essential developmental process with respect to language acquisition takes place at the level of these 'couplings'. In particular, this developmental process concerns the development of 'attentional skills', which will give rise to more sophisticated forms of attentional awareness, which in its turn will cause a developmental change in the couplings between subject and world. According to Luntley, these developing attentional skills are of vital importance to the linguistic development of a subject.

An example of the coupling between subject and world as based on the use of attentional skills can be extracted from John White (2002, pp. 32 ff.). Like Luntley, he relates language acquisition to a process of mediated adjustment to the world. In White's formulation, this process starts at a very early stage, based on pre-linguistic judgmental processes he calls 'sign recognition', which can already be observed in babies who seem to recognise the breast presumably as a sign for food (White, 2002, p. 40). Luntley (2003; 2004) refers to this kind of recognizing ability that is fundamental to any descriptive conceptual development, as the ability of 'seeing similarities'. In his view, "the notion of seeing the similarities is
primitive for Wittgenstein" (Luntley, 2002, p. 271; see also Luntley, 2003, p. 77f.). The refinement of this ability of 'seeing similarities', as a part of developing attentional awareness, is important to the conceptual and linguistic development of the subject, according to Luntley. For example, in practical activities like sports, an advanced practitioner will be able to distinguish and recognise a much more detailed pattern of relevant signs than a beginner (White, 2002, p. 42), and this ability will also support the refinement and nuance of the use of linguistic means. Against this background, it becomes understandable why Luntley describes conceptual development as a training in "seeing things aright" (Luntley, 2003, p. 173) or as an "apprenticeship in judging" (Luntley, 2004, p. 7). He has a process in mind of learning to see ever more differentiated similarities, on the basis of a preceding attitude - being hungry, wanting to hit the ball - of the subject.

In this way, Luntley relates conceptual development (or at least development with respect to 'demonstrative concepts', cf. Luntley, 2004, p. 10) primarily to the development of those "attentional skills by which we see things as similar" (Luntley, 2004, p. 7). In his view, this also affects the way we should understand the role of the community in acquiring language proficiency. According to Luntley, this community is primarily relevant with respect to the development of 'attentional skills', whereas he downplays the role of the community as provider of a set of rules for the correct use of language. "For such concepts, possession of the concept ... does not consist in a possession of a theory that drives the seeing. Hence, the model of conceptual development for such concepts has to be construed as an apprenticeship in seeing" (Luntley, 2004, p. 7). The process of 'joint attention' constitutes the core mechanism by which the community can further the development of capacities to see similarities. According to Luntley, this process results from the "fundamental impulse to share" (Luntley, 2004, p. 5), and it is directly related to the intentional relation of the subject to the world. This impulse to share constitutes the primary motive for linguistic development (Luntley, 2004, p. 172).

In as far as limited academic language proficiency is caused by inadequately developed attentional skills, Luntley's approach implies a specific explanation for the connection between poor pupil performance and limited language proficiency. From this perspective, learning problems would not so much result from a limited familiarity with the conceptual tools that are used in the classroom, but rather from limited attentional skills with respect to those realms of reality school education refers to. Many discussants in the field mention this kind of explanation for the inhibiting effects of limited academic language proficiency
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(Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Calderan et al. 1998; Eisenstein Ebsworth, 2002; Garcia, 2002; Jepson Green, 1997; Porter, 2001; Reyes & Rorrer, 2001; Thompson, 2004; Valdés, 2002; Wright, 2004). For example, Garcia seems to imply this view in considering linguistic development as expressing a capacity "for functioning in and perceiving the world" (Garcia, 2002, p. 27). The way he understands the importance of preserving each individuals language and culture of origin also seems in accordance with a Luntleyan perspective. From that perspective, the cultural capital a native language incorporates should be understood as a collection of attentional skills, from which the development of (a second) academic language would also tap. This approach can be heard in Garcia's proposition, that "many of the strategies that children use to acquire this language seem to be the same as those used in first- language acquisition" (Garcia, 2002, p. 21).

Not only the relevance of attentional skills for developing language proficiency, as emphasized by Luntley, has consequences for education. His view of the 'fundamental impulse to share' - expressed in joint attention processes - as a primary motive for linguistic development, does not remain without consequences either. In order to establish effective 'joint attention', adapted to the attentional awareness of the pupil, stimulating development in the linguistic domain will make high demands on the quality of communicative relationships between teacher and novice. As Luntley formulates it: "One aspect of this way of looking at things might be to suggest that teachers need to move closer to the communicative styles of parents with their own children, since instructional conversations will require highly refined interpersonal competencies in scaffolding the attentional frames of different individuals" (Luntley, 2004, P. 17-8). Applied to policy with respect to differential academic language proficiency, this means that - apart from assuring active participation in a language community - attuning to the direct engagement with the world of the developing subject should be secured. This aspect can be found in Garcia as well. If the school does not succeed in connecting with the "representations of the child's world it is negating the tools" that are a precondition for the linguistic development of the child (cf. Garcia, 2002, p. 27).

The introduction of the engagement with the world in the model of developing language proficiency also affects the position of the language community in the process. To put it shortly, it shifts attention from getting familiar with the conventions of usage to the more fundamental attempt to get a grip on the world as "that which is independent of will" (Luntley, 2003, p. 135), and to the attentional skills that are required to that end. From this perspective, furthering linguistic development
starts with scaffolding the process of 'coupling', of the "relation between the subject's egocentric take on things and how things are" (Luntley, 2004, p. 10-11). This way of subordinating linguistic development to engagement with the world seems consistent with a Wittgensteinian view of language as a 'tool'.

This necessary engagement of the language learning subject with the world will bear upon the issue at hand, how to deal with differential academic language proficiency in schools. If developing attentional skills should be understood as tailoring the subject's take on things, Luntley's argumentations implies a plea in favor of a child-centered approach to the child's engagement with the world would be a didactical instrument for realizing the same aim in any child: getting it better geared to this world. In order to better understand the role of the subject in its linguistic development, I will have closer look at the way this process of conceptualizing the world takes place.

4. Linguistic development as participative negotiation

Wanting to help children develop a sharper view of things, is a familiar way of approaching education. From this perspective, a mother will draw the attention of her baby to an object in the room, or a trainer will alert to as yet unnoticed details in the flight of a ball, both expecting a contribution to improved attentional skills from such actions. However, in his On Certainty Wittgenstein (1969b) warns of the tendency to adopt the idea that words are representations of objects in an external reality - as it implicitly functions in everyday usage - unquestioningly as a basis for philosophy as well. His example of a child that is learning to use the word 'tree' can explain this. 'Clearly no doubt as to the tree's existence comes into the language-game', Wittgenstein (1969b, §480) says. However, he adds, as soon as a philosopher - here personified by Moore - would say "'I know that that's a tree' one suddenly understands those who think that has by no means been settled" (Wittgenstein, 1969b, §481). "It is as if 'I know' did not tolerate a metaphysical emphasis" (Wittgenstein, 1969b, §482).

At this point, I should remind of the fact, that Luntley - in accordance with Wittgenstein - does not suggest the possibility of an unmediated grip of reality either. In addition, he does reject a purely conventionalist interpretation of Wittgenstein's view of language, that reduces conditions for correct usage to the language community alone (Luntley, 2003, p. 17), because that would render the idea of aboutness' incomprehensible. He can only explain this 'aboutness', that is characteristic of any use of language, from the role of the subject as an active agent, taking an attitude to make best sense of his ongoing confrontation with things, an
active attitude towards the impediments that go out from the world upon our behavior (Luntley, 2003, p. 2).

The question is, now, how to imagine those 'impediments that go out from the world', presupposing Wittgenstein's view, that referring to the world is not a necessary precondition for meaningfully speaking about it? At this point the way Anthony Rudd refers to a passage in On Certainty, where Wittgenstein speaks about practicing mathematics, may be of help. He says: "What it might mean to say that numbers exist is given within the practice of mathematics; there is no sense to the idea that mathematics needs to be validated by a further philosophical proof that numbers do actually exist. ... There is no further intelligible question as to whether those numbers really exist or not. The metaphysical belief in the existence of numbers gives us only a vague and misleading picture" (Rudd, 2003, p. 84-5). In Rudd's interpretation, Wittgenstein would put practices, including their implied presuppositions about the world, in the position Luntley seems inclined - however cautious - to assign to the world itself. Though the example is about mathematics, other practices - including those involving sensory experiences, perceptions, or moral and aesthetic experiences - are not principally different in this respect. In all cases, reference to the unconceptualized world is not necessary.

This concentration on practices, on practical contexts of language use, does not cause the problems Luntley sees in a purely conventionalist approach of the use of language, in particular that it would reduce constraints on correct usage to the whims of an accidental language community. Like Rudd, Nelson Goodman emphasizes the impossibility of drawing a line between language-dependent and language-independent world features. To explain this, he confronts his critic Isreal Scheffler - who questioned his conception of world-making - with the rhetorical question to indicate "which features of the stars we did not make" and "how these differ from features clearly dependent on discourse" (Goodman, 1996, p. 145). According to Goodman this does not imply that "whatever we make we can make any way we like" (Goodman, 1996, p. 145). He agrees, that we will always be constricted by the available material, but he does not localise this material in the world 'out there', but in residues of established ways of imagining it instead, in "scrap material recycled from old and stubborn worlds" (Goodman, 1996, p. 145). What I - following Wittgenstein - called 'practices' appears in Goodman's terminology as processes of making and remaking essentially conceptualized 'worlds' (in plural). In this image, constraints result from those aspects of a 'world' we leave intact, thus excluding them from the process of remaking - for the time being. To put it differently, constraints for correct usage are not understood as ontological constraints, but rather as pragmatic
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constraints - as in Wittgenstein's conception of language as a tool. Accordingly, the "impediments that go out from the world" refer to these practice-related constraints.

Relating linguistic usage to the contexts of specific practices, makes engagement with the world a primarily concept-driven process (Brandom, 2000, p. 26), and not a world-driven process, as Luntley sometimes seems to suggest. Linguistic development remains related to 'seeing things right', as Luntley calls it, but the term 'right' refers to the world as it appears in the practice at hand, not to the world 'as it is'. A further implication of this pragmatic view of practices, including their presuppositions about the world is, that those presuppositions will no longer be considered completely beyond the reach of language users. According to Williams (2004, p. 95), these themes recur in Wittgenstein's refutation of idealism. The use of language within a practice does not only consist in elaborating upon accepted presuppositions about the world, and in testing claims against them. It can also result in bringing to light some of those - mostly implicit - presuppositions, hitherto functioning as constraints to the acceptability of our descriptive claims, but now being subjected to a process of doubt and reformulation. From this perspective, linguistic development, as active world-oriented participation in a language community, becomes the connotation of practically engaged participation in processes of 'world-making'. Wittgenstein's example of the riverbed as the constraints of language-use, and the river as actual usage, is a nice illustration of this, because actual usage is not only restricted by the riverbed - accepted presuppositions about the world - it also affects its course. In addition, the "riverbed of thoughts may shift": what functions as the riverbed at one moment, can become fluid again and become disputable (cf. Wittgenstein, 1969b, §§ 94-99).

This view of linguistic development as growing to full participation in processes of negotiating the 'world' is illustrated by Carol Fleischer-Feldman (1987). Inspired by the philosophy of Wittgenstein and Goodman, she describes this process as it takes place in young children. To that end, she analyses transcribed conversations with young children, demonstrating that their participation in the process is not restricted to considering, commenting, doubting and/or elaborating upon the contributions of their adult partners. They also give evidence of being actively engaged with the implicit presuppositions behind the conversation - the constraints on acceptability - in a twofold way. First, contributions of the children to the conversation give evidence of what Fleischer-Feldman (1987, p. 136) calls 'ontic dumping'. In this process, they make use of earlier contributions from their partners in order to formulate their own subsequent contributions - apparently incorporating those earlier contri-
butions in their collection of ready-for-use presup-positions. In the context of education, this is a rather familiar process. For example, a pupil will first be invited to get familiar with the Pythagorean theorem, on the assumption that he will subsequently be able to use it as a self-evident instrument for solving new problems. The second way in which children give evidence of being actively engaged with the implicit presuppositions of a practical conversation consists in a reverse procedure, Fleischer-Feldman (1987, p. 138) calls 'dump topicalization'. In this process, children subject former - ontic dumps' to renewed procedures of doubt and discussion.

According to Fleischer-Feldman, linguistic development is related to this duality of what is presumed as being the world - the ontic - and what is being discussed on the basis of that - the epistemic. "Ontic structure and status is thus always a stipulation, by which I mean that it is one of many possible ways of construing a situation that is taken as given for the epistemic purposes at hand" (Fleischer-Feldman, 1987, p. 135-6). In this process, each of the participants, including novices, is actively engaged in constructing and reconstructing the presuppositional basis of the practice at hand. Of course it remains possible to distinguish the role of the 'expert' from that of the 'pupil', but not as simply and unambiguous as Luntley's theory would suggest by assessing the quality of attentional skills in terms of the world 'as it is'. In my revised approach, 'expertise' rather refers to the degree of familiarity with the presuppositions about the world of a specific practice. One should be aware, however, that these presuppositions are not unassailable, but can be revised, even through the agency of a novice.

The changeability of presuppositions about the world also affects the concept of 'expertise' in a second way. This is mentioned by Jan Bransen (2002), discussing Robert Brandom's theory of language. Whereas a child - or a novice in a specific field - may primarily be seeking to refine his familiarity with the presuppositions of a practice in order to attain full participation in the game of formulating and discussing claims (in Brandom's terminology: 'giving and asking for reasons'), the expert, as a full-blown participant, could be more inclined to 'dump topcalisation', to call implicit presuppositions of the current discourse - the props of accepted claims - into doubt, deriving satisfaction from questioning "some of the entitlements he used to count on his score" (Bransen, 2002, p. 389). In that sense an expert may be more uncertain than the novice, and his expertise could consist in stimulating doubts instead of certainty. In as far as linguistic development involves a process of adjustment to the world as it is supposed to be - a 'world' that can be subjected to doubt and revision at any moment whenever the current practice, the game of giving and
asking for reasons, gives rise to it. Though the expert may be more equipped for it and more inclined to it, experts as well as novices can initiate such spells of revision. Margarita Calderón, Rachel Hertz-Lazarowitz, and Robert Slavin's views of dealing with the problem of differential language proficiency seems well in tune with this philosophical view of linguistic development. They say: "for students to reach high levels of proficiency, they must engage in a great deal of oral interaction, jointly negotiating meaning and solving problems" (Calderón et al., 1998, p. 154). The concept of 'negotiation' emphasizes a specific characteristic of the relation between participants in a language community, including novices: it emphasizes how the 'world' is not an unassailable basis, but an always provisional product of the communication process itself.

5. Conclusions and comments
By way of conclusion I summarise what linguistic development requires from the developing subject. Apart from developing a personal pattern of meanings from the linguistic instruments a language community has on offer, and from applying them to new experiences, the linguistically developing subject also has to accomplish the identification of his experience as an instance of a specific 'something'. Luntley explains this as a kind of adjustment to the world, supported by attentional skills, that can be improved through procedures of joint attention. Because of the impossibility to distinguish the world 'as it is' from the 'world' we presuppose it is, this identification of experience should not primarily be understood as a result of 'seeing', but rather as a primarily concept-driven process. Following Brandom, I am inclined not to consider 'seeing similarities' - perceptual judgment - as the primary basis of linguistic development, but a kind of concept-based judgment instead. Sharply distinguishing the use of language from anything like a pure reaction to the world, Brandom denies phenomena of simple sign recognition the status of (primitive) concept-possession. Whereas one could attribute the ability of sign recognition to a thermostat, it would make no sense to consider a thermostat as a device that is in the possession of concepts (Brandom, 2000, p. 48). In order to react, the thermostat does not need a concept of temperature, because - unlike language users - it does not have to identify its experience of the situation in terms of temperature. Therefore, the thermostat lacks an ability, any concept-user will need.

Linguistic development requires that the subject develops an ability of understanding, conceptual judgment with respect to the question as 'what' a situation should be identified. This makes linguistic development principally embedded in a practice and its implied presuppositions
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about the world. The development of this capacity for conceptual judgment is related to the language community and the conceptual tools for describing the world that are developed in its various practices. This makes a language community not only a provider of linguistic devices for ends of communication, but also a workshop of conceptualized worlds, that will serve as bases for assessing claims. As a consequence, the relation of a subject and a language community is not only an issue of one-way traffic, in which the subject gets familiar with the customs of this community. The relation between subject and language community also has a character of practice-related negotiation about the definition of the world in the context of a specific practice. Against this background, the image of a 'language-game' can be done full justice, because we can now take into account, that speakers are not only engaged in a process of reporting, but at the same time in a process of defining and influencing what presuppositions about the world participants will share.

This approach of linguistic development has consequences for dealing with differential academic language proficiency, that deviate from usual practice. As mentioned before, most authors suggest an approach involving some kind of immersion in the practice of academic language. Though the results of my investigation do not deny this approach, they would lay more emphasis on bringing children in practical situations, situations of cooperative problem-solving, requiring active participation in language games, in processes of developing descriptions of the world and revising the criteria for doing so, including discussing the definition of the problem itself. This last dimension particularly seems to be lacking in educational discussions about academic language proficiency. Though some authors seem to recognise the relevance of active participation, the definition of the situation itself invariably seems to be considered unquestionable. In such cases, 'negotiation' - as Calderón et al (1998) call it - would mainly refer to the idea, that the descriptions of the world in a language community are always a provisional product of the communication process itself In their view, being involved in this process would best stimulate linguistic development. For example, Calderón, Hertz-Lazarowitz, and Slavin recommend a didactic approach, that provides opportunities for students to work together in discussing practical problems and ways of formulating them (Calderón et al., 1998, p. 154) because of its positive effects on developing academic language proficiency.

Limited academic language proficiency appears not only related to lacking familiarity with the conventions of school language, though some authors almost exclusively pay attention to this dimension, as in Rosalie Porter, who says with respect to language proficiency: "It is sound
educational policy to require one objective, uniform measure of student achievement as a prerequisite for high school graduation" (Porter, 2001, p. 409). Academic language proficiency seems also related to the degree of familiarity with prevailing presuppositions about the world in the context of this particular practice, the school. Realizing that these prevailing presuppositions result from an ongoing communicative process would put novices in a different position - less assimilatory in nature, while recognizing their active participation at a more fundamental level. Linda Thompson (2004) seems to recognize this, where she pleads in favor of a procedure that would make the organization of school education a subject of discussion between representatives of different language communities. However, her recommendations make a halt before the practice of teaching itself even starts, which excludes the process of linguistic participation from the actual teaching practice again.

Of course, my suggested theoretical model in which academic language is considered instrument as well as product of communicative practices, does not exclude the possibility of considering assimilation of linguistic minority groups a desirable approach - if only to protect traditional definitions of the world. Despite of that, the desirability of such an approach seems questionable from my point of view. It could be important to all participants - novices and proficient pupils - to be recognized as participants in the processes of communication that are involved in school education. This view suggests to regard participation in linguistic practices not merely as an instrument for the improvement of the academic achievement of linguistic minority groups, but to regard it an educational end in itself for all pupils. Becoming confronted with situations of doubt and (re)description of the world - for instance triggered by differences in language and culture - will leave all pupils better prepared for actively participating as voting citizens in contemporary globalizing societies.

6. References
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