Gender, multiple belongings and the de/selection of French in a super-diverse context

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German boys are less motivated to learn French and deselect French significantly more often than girls when graduating to high school (Grein 2012) but the reasons for this are yet unclear. The study of gender can paradoxically not only focus on gender, but needs to also consider the multiple categories intersecting with it (McCall 2005), a challenge amplified in societies described as super-diverse due to increasingly disparate migration patterns (Vertovec 2007). Furthermore, special attention needs to be paid to the factors of sociolinguistic economy in superdiversity (Blommaert & Rampton 2011), such as students’ perceptions of the prestige or the alleged economic usefulness of French, and how they interact with gendered and other aspects in the selection process.

As it is evident that no broad apriori categories such as “male” or “migrant” can be usefully employed in such a context, I use a bottom-up approach analyzing interviews to pick up the participants own group affiliations and reconstruct the diverse belongings actually influencing the decision. I take these local groups which can be gendered or linked to other categories to be heavily influential on the students habitus and thus their subject choice (Bohnsack 2012), leading to the question:

How do the intersecting collective belonging – as evoked by the students – impact the de/selection of French?

I conducted open, semi-structured interviews with students before and after graduation to high school and therefore the (de)selection of French. The participants are boys and girls from different social and (non)migratory backgrounds. Using the Documentary Method (Nohl 2010), analysis aims to reconstruct the students’ language related practices in the social context of their schools.

First results indicate that the at first glance mainly gendered selection process is influenced by a complex constellation of local factors such as school cultures and intersections with e.g. class and ‘ethnicity’.

Keywords: intersectionality, interview, gender.