# Abstract

This dissertation thesis pursues to shed light on the hitherto unexplored field of language maintenance in multilinguals from the holistic and Complex Dynamic System Theory perspective of the Dynamic Model of Multilingualism (Herdina & Jessner, 2002). The DMM predicts the development of the multilingual psycholinguistic system over time and postulates that system stability depends on language maintenance. The M-factor, whose key components are multilingual awareness and the enhanced multilingual monitor, is assumed to play a prominent role in this regard.

This investigation analyses the complexity of the learning, management, and maintenance of multiple language systems in experienced adult learners. Interviewees were all participants in the new, still unexplored phenomenon of international, large-scale polyglot event series. Respondents were recruited at the Polyglot Conference 2016 in Thessaloniki (Greece) and at the Polyglot Gathering 2017 in Bratislava (Slovakia). Participants (n = 18; m = 14; f = 4) come from nine different countries (Belarus, France, Greece, Italy, Mexico, Sweden, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the USA) and have learned LS > 6 to LS > 50 that belong to at least three different language families. Renowned polyglots such as the organizers of the Polyglot Conference Richard Simcott, Alex Rawlings, and Alexander Argüelles and conference speakers such as Helen Abadzi and Luca Lampariello agreed to take part in the current investigation as well as other speakers and simple attendees. Data was collected with two instruments: a questionnaire on the participants’ language biography and a semi-structured interview conducted via Skype or face to face. All the language systems explored by the participants were taken into consideration. The resulting qualitative data was analysed by a generic thematic approach.

Ample evidence was found for the considerable language maintenance effort of polyglots and a great number of language maintenance strategies were identified and classified. To counter phenomena of negative language growth, respondents invest large amount of time and energy into the maintenance of homeostasis. Numerous proofs were collected which show that the level of multilingual awareness and the enhanced multilingual monitor of the participants enable experienced multilinguals to orchestrate both resources and strategies smartly. The researcher identifies the smart strategy orchestration (SSO) as an emergent property in experienced multilinguals and the consequent effect both on language acquisition and maintenance as enhanced strategy effect (ESE). In language maintenance, similarly to language acquisition, affective, psychological, metacognitive factors, and individual features were found to play a relevant role.

The present dissertation, moreover, discusses the inconsistent terminology use of the terms *polyglot, hyperpolyglot,* and *multilingual* both in academia and by polyglots themselves. While a distinction between *polyglot* and *hyperpolyglot* may not be necessary, the study reveals that a distinction should be drawn between *polyglot* and *multilingual* on the ground of affective features such as the love for languages, on attitudes such as open-mindedness towards other languages and cultures, on motivation, learner autonomy, language experience, and on individual character traits such as perseverance and self-discipline rather than on the amount of language systems or language proficiency. An outlook on future research in the field of multilingualism and the transferability of findings to institutional language instruction contexts conclude the investigation.

Outcomes of the current study are confronted with information on historical polyglots described in the theoretical part of this thesis. A selection of now forgotten female polyglots is given to discuss the issue of gender and polyglottism. The linguistic biography and the work of the Hungarian polyglot Kató Lomb (1909 – 2003) are investigated in the light of the research focus of this thesis. The analysis centres around issues on terminology, language maintenance, the age factor and language talent. The most eminent historical polyglot, Cardinal Giuseppe Mezzofanti (1774 – 1849), his language biography and the issue around his linguistic repertoire, were the starting point of this thesis and are the point of reference of issues around terminology for modern-day polyglots.