

# Theory, rationale and evidence base for MTB-MLE



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# Different Language Contexts

**Homogeneous  
(rural settings)**

**LI as MOI**  
Learn L2 as subject at least  
until threshold level

**Multilingual mixed  
(urban settings)**

**Language teaching program**  
Learn new L2 at least until  
threshold level before assuming  
learning through it.

**2 or 3 languages  
Rural/urban settings)**

1. MTB-MLE (one L)
2. Two streams .....
3. Language teaching

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## Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education

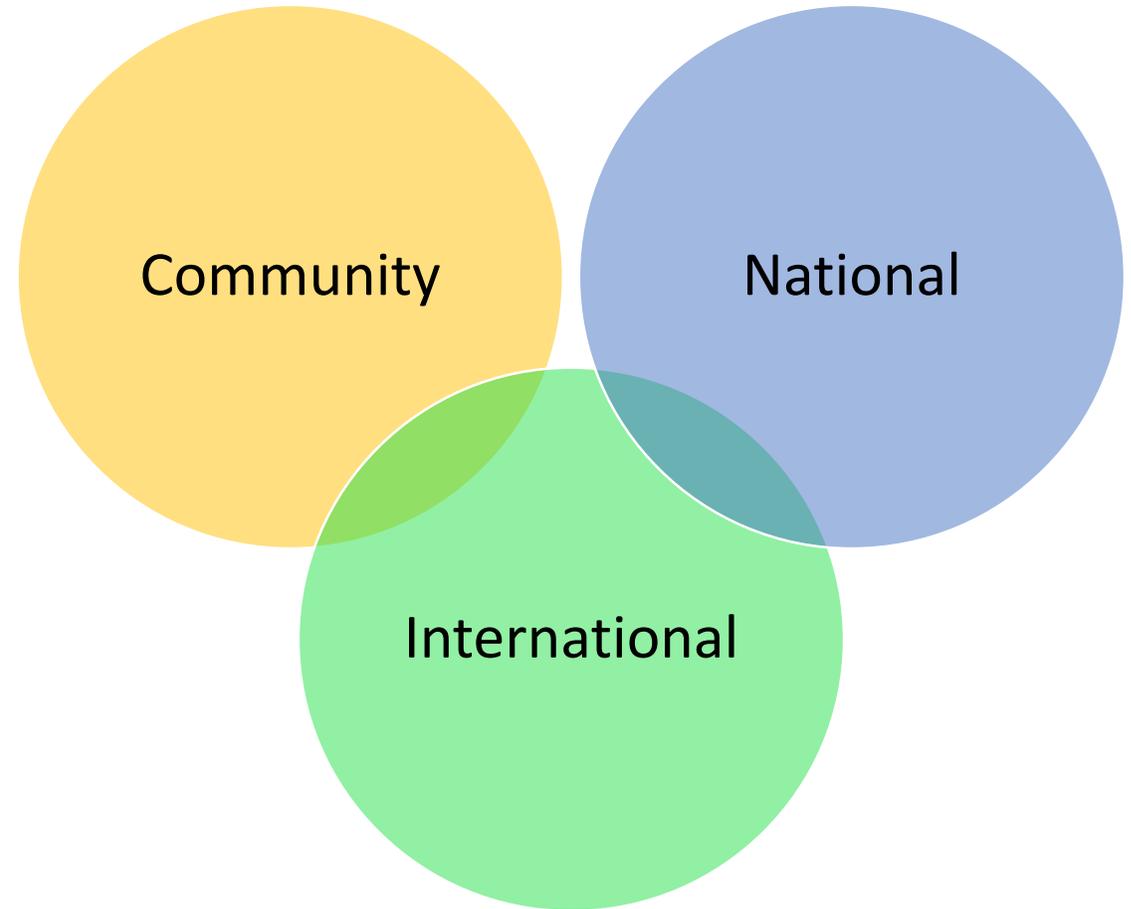
Education program that takes into account the ‘mother tongue’/ home language of the child.

It helps the child to become bi/multilingual at school, starting with the language the child knows best (or well).



# Why?

- In multilingual countries, one has to be a multilingual citizen to fully participate in society, at national and local level.
- To participate in the global world, multilingualism is important.



# Learning a new language: where and when?

## Informal

- At home
- Business - when one knows one can benefit from the other language as in business (selling fruit, veggies, other goods).

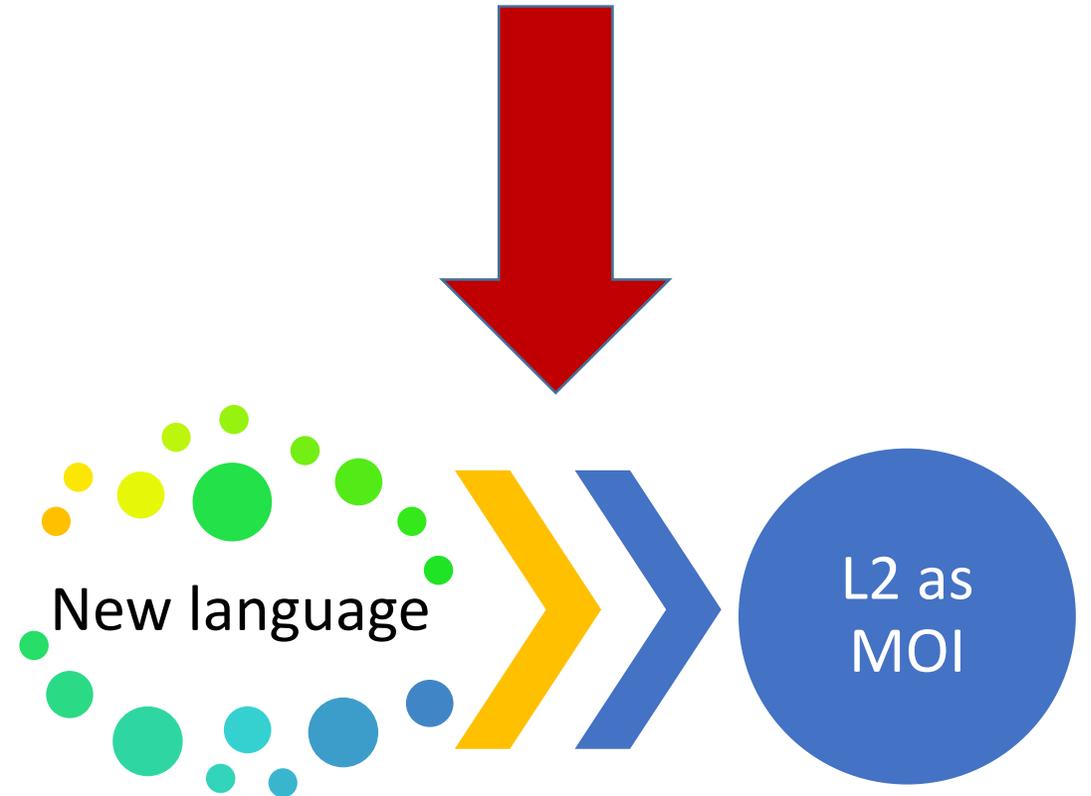
## (Non) Formal

- Language courses
- Most common place to learn new languages is at school.

# What do we know? (theory)

## Linguistic threshold hypothesis

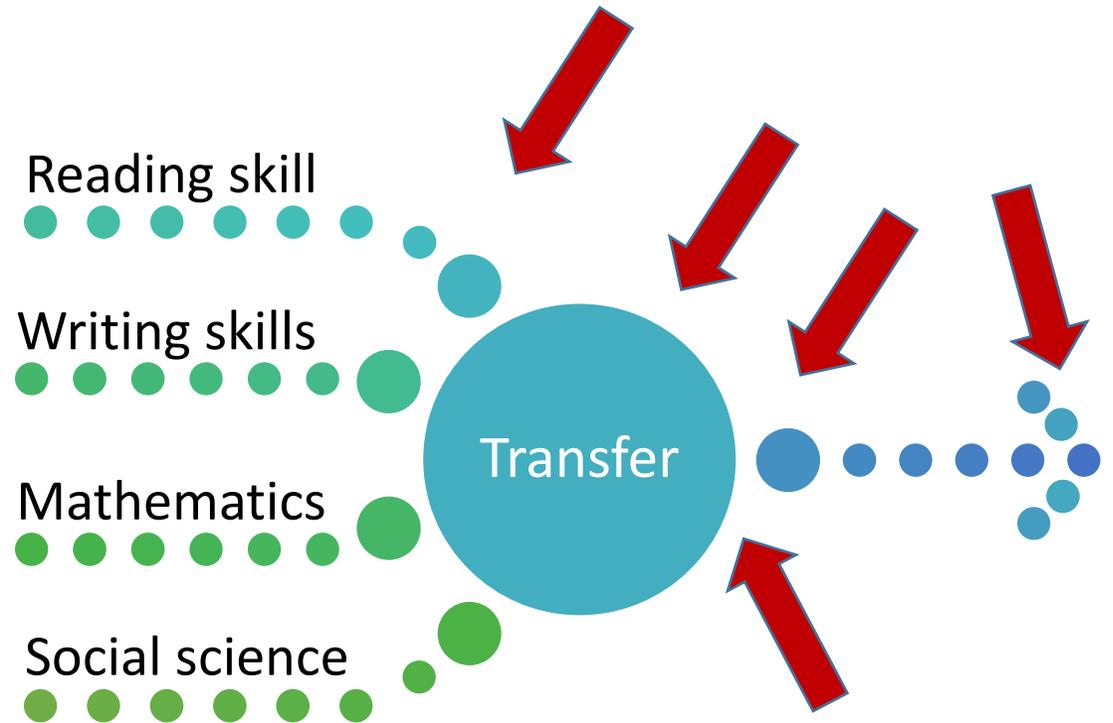
- a linguistic threshold is a necessary point that a bilingual student must reach in order to **benefit** from bilingualism (Cummins, 1979).



# What do we know? (theory)

## Linguistic interdependence hypothesis

- in bilingual development, language and literacy skills can be *transferred* from one language to another



# What do we know? (theory)

## Reaching the threshold takes time

- the language threshold for reading is largely based on the vocabulary size of the language user (Eyckmans, 2004; Hirsh & Nation, 1992; Nation, 2006).
- Vocabulary size threshold is language dependent

## Vocabulary threshold

- **English +/- 3000 words**
- **French +/- 2200**
- **Greek +/- 3450 (Milton, 2001)**
- *L2 learners learn about 400-500 words a year (foreign L2) (Nation 1990, (Orosz 2009)*

# What do we know? (theory)

Transfer starts as knowledge in L2 is learnt

- Phonological awareness
- Picture reading
- Reading letters
- Writing letters
- **Comprehension**

**Comprehension**

- Only happens when children know the language (voc/gram) of what they read/hear.
- Very controlled language till initial threshold is reached
- Still controlled till comfortable level is reached
- Children need to learn independent language learning skills

# Summarise theory

- Linguistic threshold that needs to be reached before learners can benefit cognitively from new language as MOI
- Transfer of things learnt in L1 to L2/FL – gradual
- Language learning takes time – 5-6 years before initial threshold is reached

# Different approaches to Multilingual Education

## Early Exit

LI of child is 1-3-5 years  
MOI.  
Then L2/3 becomes MOI.

## Late Exit

LI of the child is MOI 6 years  
or longer, then L2/3 becomes  
MOI.

## Dual/Additive

LI of the child remains a part  
of education.

# Success of different approaches to MLE

**Early Exit**

**Weak program, hardly  
successful.**

**Late Exit**

**Starts to become successful**

**Dual/Additive**

**Successful and balanced**

# What is necessary for successful multilingualism?

1. Learning a new language or languages.

Learning a new language takes time, it is important to make sure that the children have time to learn a language well.

2. Based on what is known to be successful to a **particular context**

Not on what one thinks/insist should work because that is the time given.

3. Includes the language that a child already speaks.

4. Recognises, appreciates and builds on the linguistic and cultural background of the children.

# Ad I - Learning a new language (in school setting)

- Takes time
  - About 400-500 words per year
  - English a language threshold is about 3000 words = 5-6 years
- Needs to be done in a structured way (even with young children that 'pick up' a language).
- When children have been in school for a few years they become better and faster language learners than young children.
- Build on the first language
- Needs a well thought through curriculum/syllabus/scope and sequence.

# Ad 2 - Context of language learning

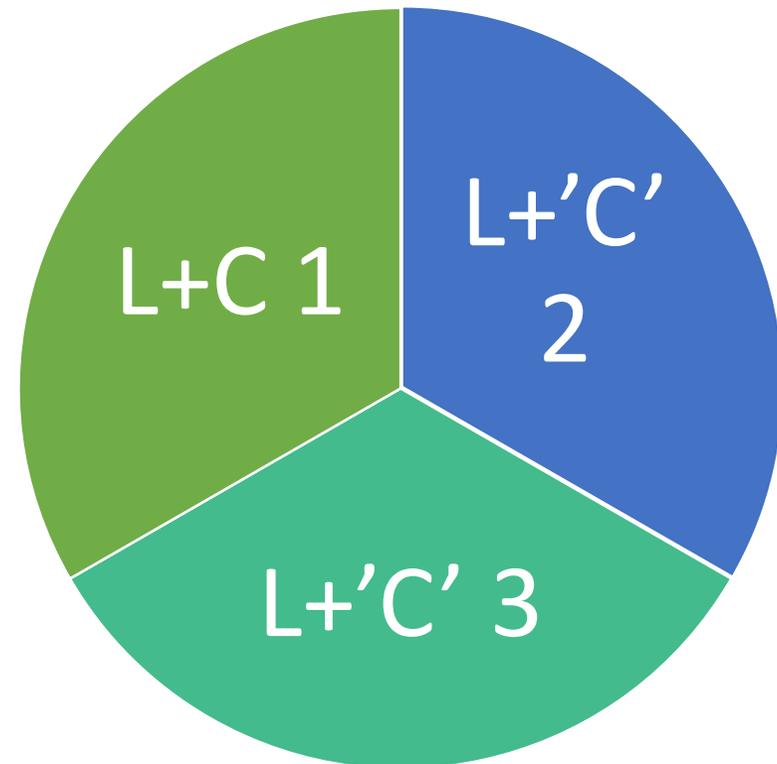
- Language distance influences time of language learning
  - Sabaoth – English
  - Dutch – English
  - Rana Tharu – Nepali
  - Rana Tharu - English
- Language exposure outside the classroom
- Attitude towards the new language
- Language level of teacher

# Ad 3 – Include the home language

- Including the home language of a child for a sufficient number of years has been successful in many developing countries.
  - And in for example Sweden, the Netherlands UK, America
  - In those countries we see that immigrant children whose language is not used tend to lag behind a bit.

# Ad 4 - Recognises, appreciates and builds on the linguistic and cultural background of the children.

- Builds on their language
- Learns with examples from their own culture/surroundings
- Nurtures appreciation for all languages, including the children's home language
  - No – 'Backward culture'
  - No – 'Backward Language'



# Where has it worked?

Language Communities in:

- Kenya
- Burkina Faso
- Nepal
- Philippines
- Ethiopia
- Cameroon
- Mali
- Nigeria
- South Africa
- Most European countries



# PLANNING FOR MTB-MLE

# Planning steps

1. Know the language context (language mapping)
2. LI Literacy aspects needed to develop MTB-MLE
3. L2/FL curriculum
4. Teachers, schools, community
5. Develop
6. Pilot
7. Implement
8. Monitor/improve



# For more theory and background reading:

Alidou, Hassana, Birgit Brock-utne, and Yaya Satina. *Optimizing Learning and Education in Africa – the Language Factor*. Paris, 2006.

Baker, Colin. *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. 4th ed. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 2006.

Pflepsen, A, C Benson, C Chabbott, and A. J. Van Ginkel. *Planning for Language Use in Education : Best Practices and Practical Steps to Improve Learning Outcomes* *Planning for Language Use in Education : Best Practices and Practical Steps to Improve Learning Outcomes*. Washington, DC, 2015.

Van Ginkel, A. J. “Additive Language Learning for Multilingual Settings.” Washington, DC: USAID, 2014. [pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PA00JW1R.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00JW1R.pdf).