

Language and academic success of international students at German universities

The SpraStu project

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GEFÖRDERT VOM



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
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Background

- increasing number of international students at German higher educational institutions (,Hochschulen‘; in 2009: 239.143, in 2016: 340.305, DZHW/DAAD 2017: 3)
- dropout rates for BA students high (41% vs 28%, Heublein et al. 2014)
- reasons mostly unknown
- common assumption:
 - insufficient language abilities,
 - new study culture in Germany,
 - and lack of social integration (Bärenfänger et al. 2016; Heublein 2015)

Background: Some findings

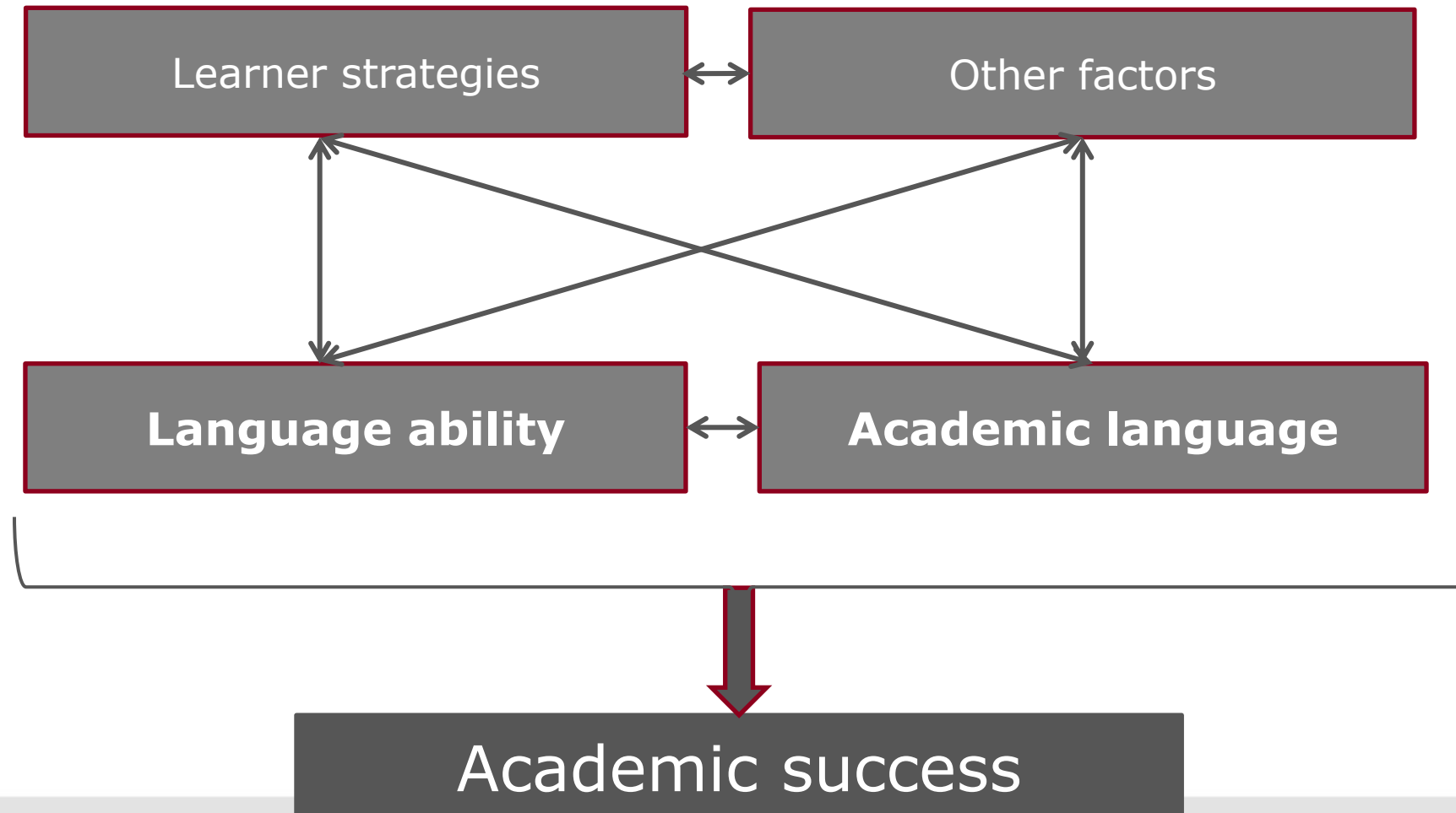
- int. students claiming to have considerable language problems: 32% (2012; 2003: 19% BMBF 2013)
- insufficient knowledge of German (sem.1) according to universities: 40% (GATE Germany 2010; Heublein/Richter 2011)
- 25% cannot sufficiently follow academic lectures (Heublein/Richter 2011)
- sufficient language knowledge: 30% of students from East Asia, 37% from Africa/Middle East, 55% from Latin America
- sufficient language knowledge: 39% students of engineering, 54% mathematics & sciences, 63% humanities and economics (DZHW 2015, self-evaluations)

„Sprache und Studienerfolg“ (SpraStu)

Project overview

- aim: contribution to the understanding of the role of language for academic success of international students
- longitudinal study (**06/2017-10/2020**)
- Universities of Leipzig & Würzburg
- participants: appr. 600 students (in 2 cohorts)
- students of economics, chemistry, German studies/German as a foreign language
- financed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)

SpraStu building blocks

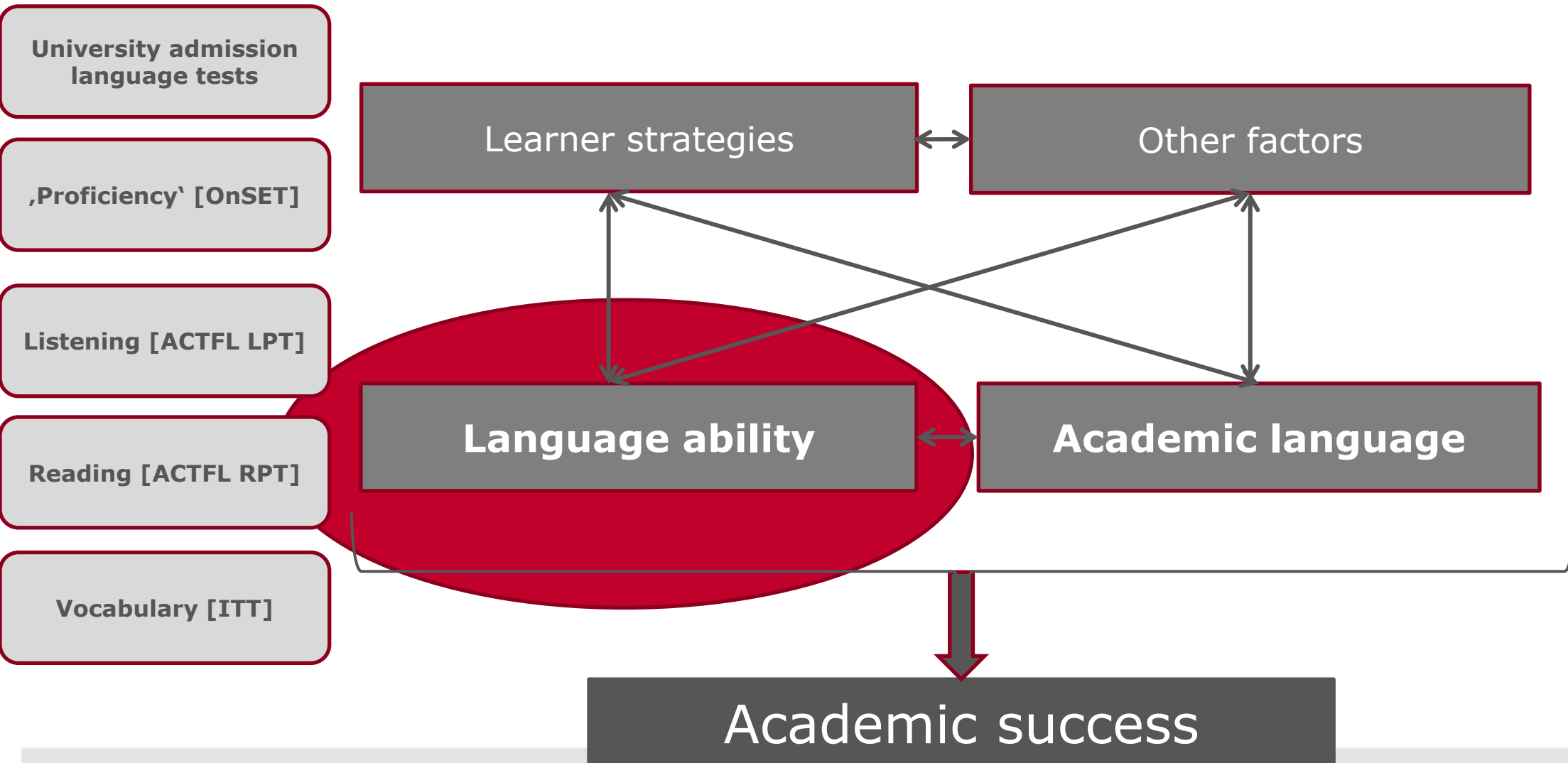


Academic success in SpraStu

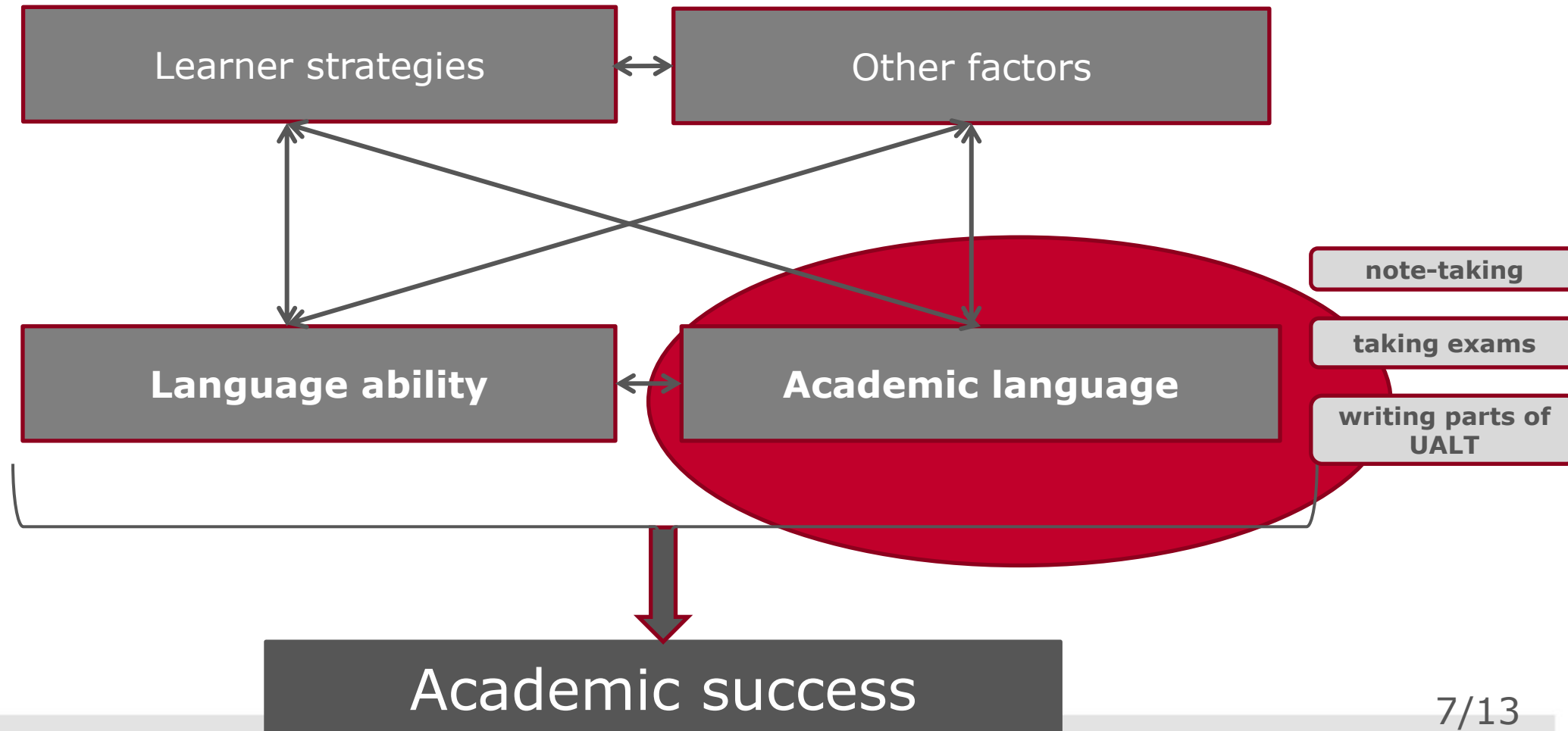
- **academic achievement** (*grades*),
- **satisfaction**,
- **persistence**,
- attainment of learning objectives,
- acquisition of desired skills and competencies,
- postcollege performance

(York, Gibson & Rankin 2015; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek 2006)

SpraStu building blocks



SpraStu building blocks



Why academic language?

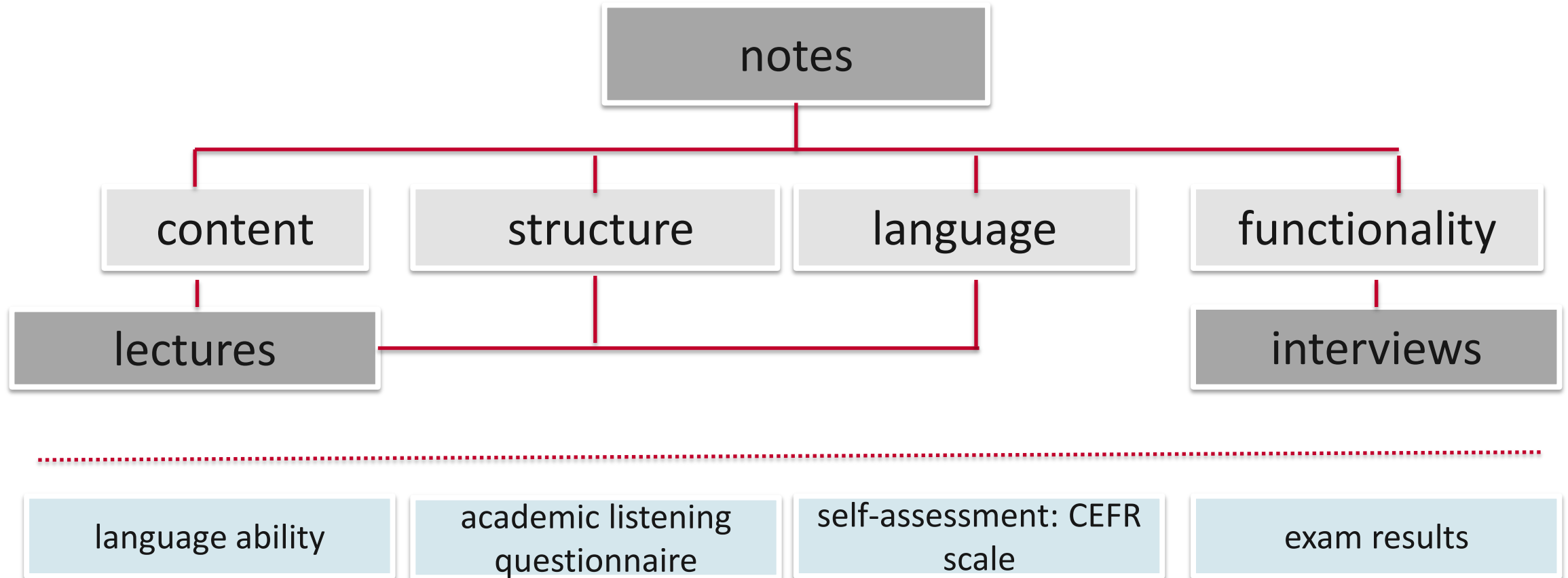
- language tests for university admission cannot fully mirror linguistic reality in academia (Arras et al. 2012; Bärenfänger et al. 2016; Kecker 2015; Marks 2015) , more specific activities based on the use of academic language play a crucial role
- build a link between language testing research and research on German academic language (Becker-Mrotzek et al. 2013; Ehlich 1995, 1999; Fandrych 2010; Fandrych/Graefen 2010; Redder 2014; Tschirner et al. 2016 ...)

Academic language: Note-taking from lectures

- “If lecturing is the instructors’ sacred cow, then lecture notetaking is the students’ pet calf.” (Titsworth & Kiewra 2004: 448)
- very common even when a variety of other supporting material is available (Arras 2012, Bärenfänger et al. 2016, Ehlich/Steets 2003)
- strategy for memorization, reproduction, further processing of lecture contents
- academic listening – reduction of complexity – mostly, reading – producing text useful for a range of purposes under time pressure (Steets 2003)
- connected to listening comprehension (Dunkel 1988, Carrell 2007, Carrell et al. 2004, Cushing 1993, Song 2011...), learning from lectures for L2 speakers (Chaudron et al. 1994; Dunkel & Davy, 1989; Dunkel et al. 1989)
- no empirical research for L2 German

Analysis of note-taking

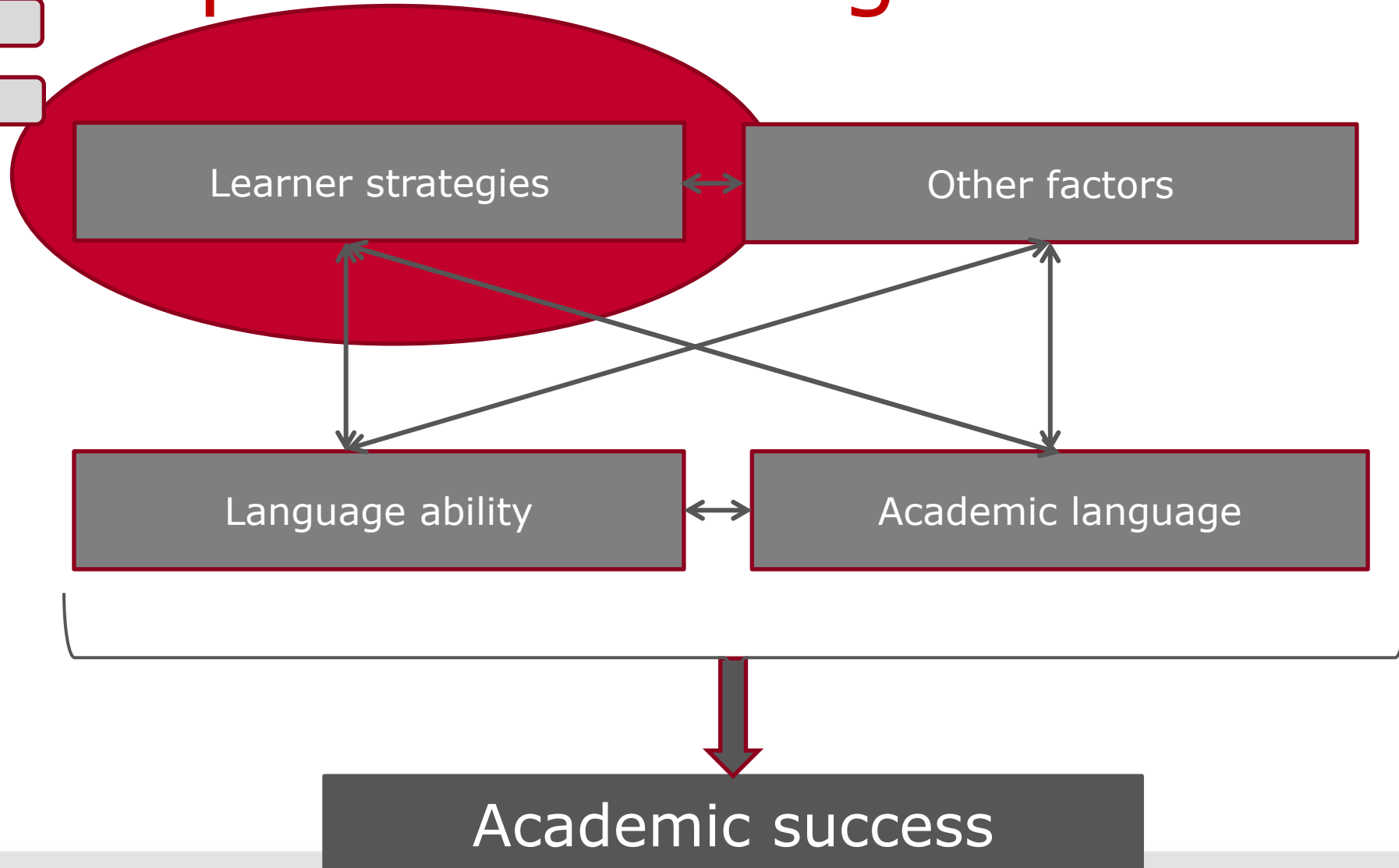
Provisional scheme



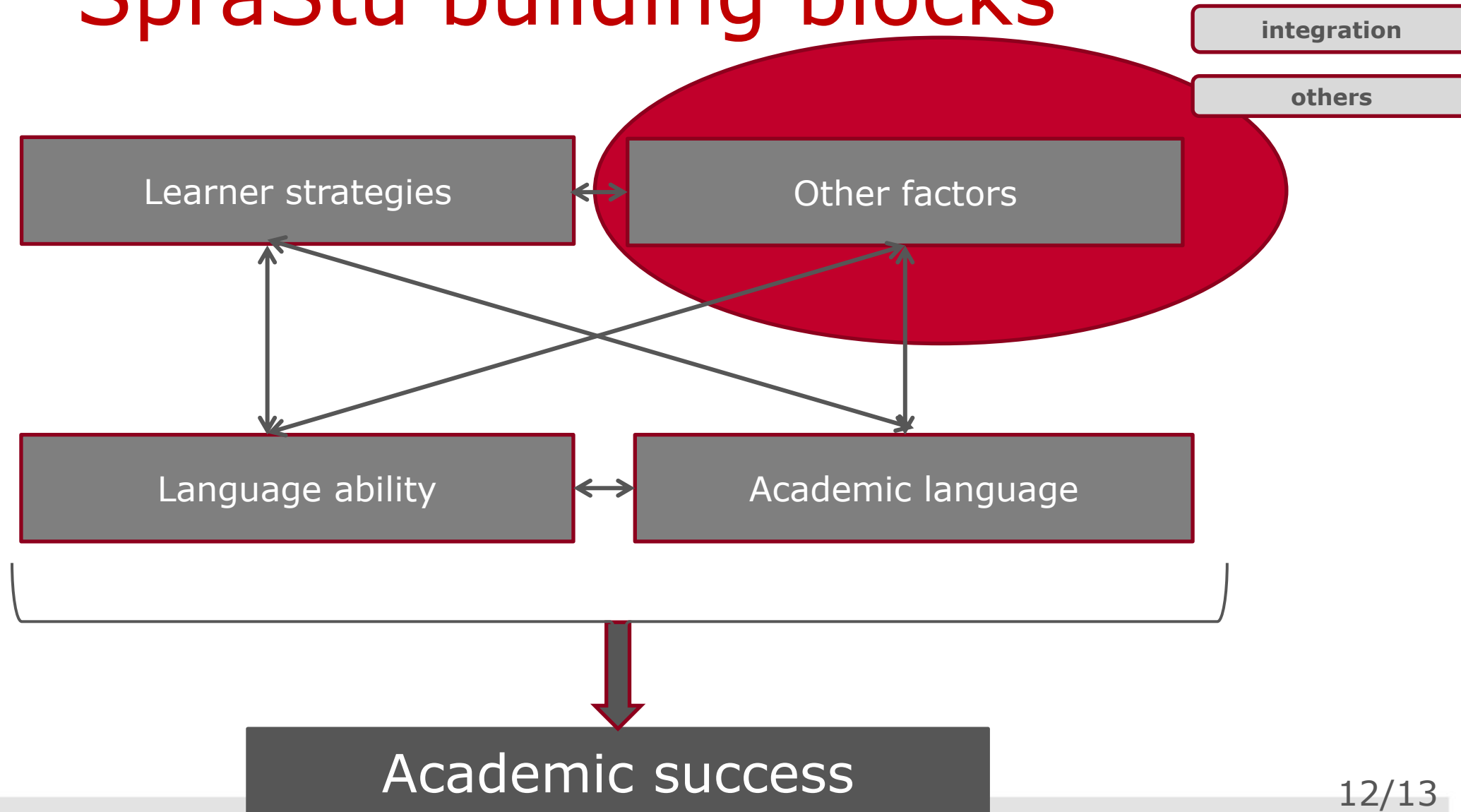
SpraStu building blocks

learner strategies

test strategies



SpraStu building blocks



Outlook: Some expected outcomes

- insights on building blocks, e.g., development of language ability during course of study, challenges caused by typical academic tasks...
 - insights on relationships between SpraStu building blocks, e.g., language ability & academic language
 - insights on importance of building blocks for academic success
- uncover advantageous & unfavourable constellations for academic success from a language perspective**

**Thank you for your
attention!**

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