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Code-switching Among Primary School Pupils: Three Languages in Contact*

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INTRODUCTION

A considerable number of studies have been conducted in the area of code-switching over the years. Code-switching is defined as "the use of more than one language in the course of a single communicative episode" (Heller 1988) and it is considered as a "central part of bilingual discourse" (Appel & Muysken 1987, as in Poulisse & Bongaerts 1994).

Roughly speaking, code-switching among bilingual speakers has been examined from two viewpoints: (a) that of formal syntax focusing on investigating the syntactic constraints to which code-switching is subject (see Halmari 1993); (b) the sociolinguistic perspective of code switching investigating the role with the emphasis on its functions and meaning in the discourse (for example, Auer 1984; Blom & Gumperz 1972; Hymes 1974; Gardner-Chloros 1985, 1991; Gumperz 1982; Li Wei & Milroy 1995; see also an extensive collection of articles on, and anthropological perspectives of, code-switching in Heller 1988).

The aim of this case study is to examine the code-switching practices of bilingual (Turkish- L1 and Greek- L2) primary school pupils learning a foreign language (in this case English) and suggest a discourse-based analytical and interpretive framework that takes into account both macro- and micro-linguistic dimensions of code-switching (cf. Heller 1988; McClure & McClure 1988). In particular, the macro-linguistic parameters include the language practices and preferences concerning language choice of these bilingual speakers as well as their attitudes towards clarification requests. The micro-linguistic parameters include the domain of discourse, the setting, the participants, the topic, and the short-term interactional goals of the speakers negotiated during the on-going interaction.

Consequently, the framework of analysis proposed in this case study draws from the ethnography of speaking (Hymes 1974), conversation analysis (Li Wei & Milroy 1995) and interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1982). The

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ethnography of speaking investigates how shared "rules of speaking" guide speakers from various linguistic groups in communicating among themselves and others (Hymes 1974: 62). These "rules of speaking" are based on the sociocultural values and patterns of language choice shared by the members of each linguistic group.

Conversation Analysis, on the other hand, investigates in detail the sequential organization of conversational discourse in order to interpret functions and meanings found locally in the discourse. For this purpose, in examining instances of code-switching, it focuses on the location of alternative language choices in the turn-by-turn organization of the interaction. Lastly, interactional sociolinguistics examines situational factors such as topic, participants and setting as well as other factors such as the degree of familiarity of the speakers or the degree of power and solidarity among the speakers and how these factors interact with the speaker's language choice. In this context, the speaker is seen as a participant in an ongoing interaction who exploits code choices as discourse strategies to signal speaker intentions and interactional goals whether short-term or long-term.

THE DATA

The data under investigation were collected by the researcher, a Greek-English bilingual who also speaks Turkish, using two methods: (a) audio-recordings and (b) structured interviews. I was able to audio-record the data while tutoring English and Greek to bilingual Turkish-Greek primary school children as a volunteer tutor for the Volunteer Program of the Municipality of Athens (a non-profit organization based in Athens) in the area of Gazi. The data collected include approximately 24.5 hours of tape-recorded discourse of classroom interactions. Most of these recordings (18.5 hours) are between the researcher and one pupil. The remaining are between the researcher and more than one pupil (6 hours). The data have been collected over a period of eighteen months and transcribed orthographically.

As for the structured interviews regarding the language practices and preferences of these bilingual pupils about language choice as well as their attitudes regarding clarification requests, I conducted them with community members (adults and children), educationalists, psychologists, sociologists and social workers.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Before the data are discussed, based on the theoretical framework briefly referred to earlier, I will describe the Greek Muslim community of Gazi since it provides the social context of this study and has never been studied before from a sociolinguistic perspective. This community which resides in the area of Gazi (that is Kerameikos, Votanikos, Metaksourgio) is estimated in the region of 3,000 to 4,000 people. It is part of a larger Muslim Greek community residing in Attiki (mainly in Drapetsona, Eleusina and in a few other in-

dustrial areas). The latter is estimated in the region of 8,000 to 10,000 people (there are no official statistics concerning the number of Muslim Greeks residing in Attiki).

The members of the community in question moved to Gazi from Western Thrace where they form an indigenous religious minority recognized by the Greek state on the basis of the Lausanne Treaty (1923). The majority comes from Komotini, Ksanthi and the villages around these urban centers while few come from Orestiada. This migration process started in the early '70s and steadily increased throughout the '80s and '90s. The reasons for this migration are economic.

The community comprises three ethnic and linguistic groups: those of Turkish origin whose mother tongue is Turkish, those of Pomak origin who speak Pomakika and those of Rom origin who speak a variety of Romany. The data presented in this study are from Turkish-speaking L1 primary school children.

Reports by educationalists, psychologists, sociologists and social workers (see special reference section about the Muslim Greek community of Athens) working with this community have indicated that the overwhelming majority of this community has a very low socio-economic status and very high illiteracy levels. Concerning the socio-economic status of the community members, unemployment is very high among adult members since the majority works as unskilled temporary or seasonal laborers or collects and sells recyclable materials such as aluminum, paper or glass. Very few are employed in the public sector such as in banks or in public utility companies in menial jobs.

Regarding the literacy level of the adult members of this community, most male adults have had minimal to some schooling whereas nearly all female adults have had no or minimal schooling. Concerning the children's literacy level, although the majority enrolls in primary school, many do not attend school regularly. The reasons for low attendance in schools are mainly socio-economic since many of these children work on a temporary or seasonal basis or have to stay at home and take care of younger siblings and do the household chores while their parents go to work. Moreover, many children have learning difficulties and lag behind. As a result, only few manage to successfully complete primary school education and these children rarely go on to high school. Lastly, even though both boys and girls are sent to school, overall boys stay in school longer than girls.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

I will now present and discuss the findings of this case study concerning the language preferences of the bilingual primary school pupils and their code-switching practices.

(i) *Language Preferences*

Upon examining the data, it appears that there is a strong preference

among these primary school bilingual pupils for using one language only, namely Greek, in classroom interactions. To interpret this strong preference for one language only in the interactions in question, it is necessary to investigate certain macro-linguistic parameters, namely the bilingual pupils' linguistic practices and preferences concerning language choice.

Concerning the bilingual pupils' language practices and preferences, the present research indicates that Turkish is spoken exclusively at home with Turkish speaking monolingual speakers as well as with Greek-Turkish bilingual speakers whether grandparents, aunts, uncles, parents, younger or older siblings. Also, Turkish is spoken among community members in different domains including the local "kafeneio", on the street and in the neighborhood regardless of whether the interlocutors are monolinguals or bilinguals. Greek, on the other hand, is spoken in the public arena including the workplace, at school, in the shops and in other public places not only with non-Turkish-speaking people but also with Turkish-speaking people when non-Turkish-speaking people are present.

These findings strongly suggest that there appears to be a strong preference for one language only depending on the domain and the participants present in the interaction.

Also, concerning the clear separation of domains of language use, they seem to be in agreement with findings from other ethnographic studies of code-switching patterns (Blom & Gumperz 1972; Heller 1982; Myers-Scotton 1976; Poplack 1980; Gumperz 1982; Heller 1988). Besides, these findings are supported by Sella-Mazi (1995, 1997) who has carried out similar research with adults from the bilingual Greek-Turkish speaking minority of Western Thrace – a part of which is the Greek-Turkish speaking community of Gazi. Consequently, the language practices and preferences of these bilingual pupils appear to reflect the community practices and preferences regarding language choice.

Given these language practices and preferences it is not surprising that these bilingual primary school children seem to have a preference for one language only, namely Greek, in classroom interactions in spite of the fact that they may have a rather low proficiency in it. This preference may be further explained if one takes into account that these bilingual children attend Greek monolingual schools and are taught by Greek speaking monolingual teachers. Another factor that may have also accentuated this strong preference for one language only is that, given the pupils' overall very low proficiency in English, instruction in English was conducted mainly through Greek. Thus, even though this was a case of three languages in contact, Greek had by far the most prominent position among the three languages.

Consequently, it appears that these bilingual pupils have associated the domain of school whether inside or outside the school premises, whether learning Greek or English, and whether being taught by their regular school teacher or a volunteer tutor, with the use of Greek – regardless of whether the teacher may or may not also speak Turkish. It appears that having associated

school and teachers with the use of Greek, these bilingual children seem willing to accommodate to the mother tongue of their teacher-addressees both when addressing their teacher and when addressing other classmates in the presence of their teacher. This sociolinguistic sensitivity of children to accommodate to addressee(s) as well as third party participants has been well-documented in the literature (see articles focusing on the use of code-switching by young (middle class) children acquiring two or more languages in Moffat & Milroy 1992).

(ii) *Code-switching Practices*

Even though preference for one language only, namely Greek, appears to prevail in classroom interactions, there are instances in the data where code-switching is used. Examples of code-switching from Greek to Turkish in classroom interactions were found in cases when the researcher and more than one pupil were present. In terms of the location of these switches, all instances of code-switching reported in the data occurred at turn boundaries where speakers switched from Greek to Turkish in consecutive turns. Only one switch occurred within a sentence-utterance where the different constituents were coded in Greek with a one-word switch into Turkish by the same speaker while none occurred at the end of sentence-utterance boundaries of a single speaker. However, no switches from Greek to English were found in the data in question.

Two examples of code-switching from Greek to Turkish in classroom interactions will be presented and discussed according to macro-linguistic parameters including the bilingual pupils' linguistic practices and preferences concerning clarification requests as well as micro-linguistic parameters, like the domain of discourse, the setting, the topic, the participants and their short-term interactional goals negotiated step-by-step during the on-going interaction (Gumperz 1982; Li Wei & Milroy 1995).

The examples presented occur at the end of an English class. The classroom interaction preceding the code-switched utterances has been in Greek and English. There are three boys present along with the researcher (R). A. (age 14 who is attending 6th grade), L. (age 14 who is attending 6th) and T. (age 12 who is attending 5th grade). A. and T. are brothers. All three boys have a good command of both Greek and Turkish and are learning English at school. Their proficiency in English, however, is at a very low level. At this point in the discourse the researcher has explained to the pupils their English homework assignment for the following week. She has given them a hand-out with 15 fill-in-the-blank sentences. However, there appears to be a misunderstanding among the three boys as to what they have to do with their assignment. The boys try to resolve this misunderstanding among themselves without asking for the assistance of the teacher who is standing a little further away.

1 L λάθος τόγραψα =
I wrote it down incorrectly

2 T τους αριθμούς θάγραψε =
she must have written down the numbers
3 R = εντάξει = (addresses T)
ok
4 A = το γράφει και το βιβλίο δεν είναι ανάγκη
the book also has this so it's not necessary (to write it down)
5 R οκ τι ήθελα να σου πω τώρα;
ok I wanted to tell you something (addresses T)
6 T φεύγουμε;
can we go now?
7 R όχι εσύ έχεις γαλλικά
no you have a French class
8 L buraya altına şeyleri mi? ancak şeyleri çizerek ...
να κάνουμε αυτά που έχει γράψει εδώ κάτω; αυτά στις γραμμές;
should we complete these things here? the things on the lines?
9 A έλα ρε να στα δώσω και εδώ τους τα έχει γράψει
come on man I'll show you she (the researcher) has written these things for them over here
10 L değil be oğlum sayılar demi. başka birşey var içinde.
Όχι ρε αγόρι μου δε λέει (εννοεί) τους αριθμούς. υπάρχει (εννοεί) κάτι άλλο εδώ
no man she doesn't mean the numbers we have to do something else here
11 A ποια έχει εδώ;
what does she have here?
12 T ποια έχει; ούτε μπρος
what does she have? neither in the front
13 L φεύγουμε κυρία;
can we go (now) ma'am?

From the onset of this interaction there appears to be a misunderstanding among the three boys concerning their homework. L. suspects that he has written down the homework assignment incorrectly and appears to appeal to A. and T. for assistance (line 1). However, his request for clarification is addressed by neither A. nor T. The former seems to misunderstand the content of the request and starts talking about the numbers written at the beginning of each sentence on the handout (line 2) while the latter appears to give a rather vague answer advising him to look into the textbook where everything is clearly written out for him (line 4). While this interaction is going on, the researcher who has been standing a little further away turns to T. and tries unsuccessfully to catch his attention (line 3); she tries again a little later (line 5). At that point, T. asks her for permission for the boys to leave (line 6). The researcher refuses, telling him that they still need to check his French homework (line 7). Right after this short exchange between the researcher and T., L. tries to clarify once more what he has to do for homework. This time he

addresses A. in Turkish and tries to make his clarification request clearer by focusing on the problem spot, namely on whether he should complete the blank spaces in the sentences or not (line 8). Even though L. addresses A. in Turkish, A. answers back to him in Greek (line 9). Like in the previous exchange (lines 1-4), A. does not appear to understand what the problem is because he seems to think that everything has been written down clearly either in the book as he already said (line 4) or in the handout (line 9). Again L. is not satisfied with the answer and tries to clarify the homework further (line 10) by addressing A. again in Turkish. This time instead of answering his question A. turns to his brother T. who participated at the beginning of the interaction and who had been talking with the researcher before the code-switched utterances and asks him to clarify what L. is asking him about (line 11). But, T. does not seem to understand A.'s question (line 12) and thus cannot clarify the request either. Finally, L. who has not received an answer yet by either of them addresses the researcher. However, instead of asking for assistance he asks for permission to leave (line 12).

Before investigating the presence of code-switching locally (lines 8 and 10), it would be helpful to examine this classroom interaction in terms of the bilingual pupils macro-level attitudes regarding clarification requests. The present research indicates that these bilingual children seldom ask adults clarification questions. When they do have a clarification question, they ask their peers or older siblings or they find out the answer on their own. This pattern of behavior has also been noted in classroom interactions where children avoid asking their teachers questions, even if they are encouraged to do so. Instead they resort to their classmates and if the latter can not answer their question, it remains unanswered. These attitudes regarding clarification requests may explain the reason why even though the researcher who had assigned the homework was present during the interaction she was never asked to clarify L.'s question. Instead, L. resorted to his friends and fellow class-mates for clarification, thereby appearing to adhere to the language practices and preferences regarding this particular speech act of these bilingual pupils.

Apart from the macro-level attitudes towards clarification requests, a number of situational factors appeared to have favoured the presence of code-switching in this interaction. To begin with, the interaction in question takes place at the end of class. Therefore, the preference of using one language per domain, in other words the use of Greek in classroom interactions can be altered more easily. In addition, the researcher and pupils are no longer sitt-ing around a table, like during class time. In fact, the researcher is standing on one side of the table and the boys are standing a little further on the other side of the table facing each other. The way they are positioned excludes the researcher from the interaction and there is no eye-contact between the researcher and the boys. Given this spatial arrangement, the community practices that dictate accommodating to any non-Turkish-L1-speaker-present-by-using-Greek-only in the interaction does not seem to apply in this case.

Another important factor at play could be the interactional goals of L. that triggered this interaction and produced the code-switched utterances as opposed to those of the other two speakers (see Gumperz 1982). From the onset of the interaction, L.'s goal seems to be to get a clarification from the other two speakers before leaving the classroom while the goal of the other two appears to be to leave the classroom as soon as possible since the lesson has already finished. This can be seen in T.'s request for permission for all three boys to leave (line 6), regardless of the fact that L. had already expressed to both T. and A. his need for a clarification about the homework. By formulating his clarification request first in Greek and then reformulating it twice in Turkish, L. appears to be signaling to the other speakers that there is a serious problem in the on-going interaction calling for immediate attention and repair. However, neither A. nor T. seem to agree on the need for immediate repair which may also explain the reason why A. answers back in Greek instead of switching to Turkish as well. This lack of congruence in agreeing on the need for a repair, can also be seen in the use of contrastive prosody along with the particle "re" by A. in "ela re" (translated into English as "come on man", line 9) spoken in a mocking manner in an attempt to trivialize the problem as opposed to the use of the same particle "be" which is the equivalent of "re" in Turkish by L. in "değil be oğlum" (translated into English as "no man", line 10) said in exasperation in an effort to highlight the problem. Therefore, the use of contrastive language may well serve as another means of giving prominence to the problem and drawing the listeners' attention to the need for a repair (for the use of contrastive language as an attention getter, see Li Wei & Milroy 1995).

At the same time the use of code-switching at these two instances in the interaction may also serve to neutralize the conflict in the interactional goals of the three speakers. By using the in-group code of his community, L. appeals to his listeners' in-group alliances, and attempts to mitigate the force of the conflict in the speakers' interactional goals in order to accomplish his task, i.e. find out how to do the homework (for the use of contrastive language to neutralize conflict, see Heller 1988).

CONCLUSION

In this case study, I have examined the language preferences concerning language choice and the code-switching practices of bilingual (Turkish- L1 and Greek- L2) primary school pupils learning a foreign language (in this case English). Based on the classroom data in question, even though this was a case of three languages in contact, Greek had by far the most prominent position among the three languages. This was indicated by the seemingly overwhelming preference for the use of Greek, the rare switches from Greek to Turkish and the absence of switches from Greek to English.

In addition, I have proposed a discourse-based analytical and interpretative framework to interpret the data in question. This framework has tried to

take into consideration both macro-level sociolinguistic parameters such as the language practices and preferences of these bilingual pupils concerning language choice as well as micro-level, locally constructed sociolinguistic parameters such as the setting, the domain, the participants and their short-term interactional goals negotiated during the on-going interaction.

To generalize on the claims made in this case study concerning language preferences and the code-switching practices of these children, however, more domains need to be investigated (for example, interactions at home, in the neighborhood) and with different audience configurations (for instance, among Greek monolingual and/or Greek-Turkish bilingual peers, across generations). Data collected in different domains and with different speaker configurations may result in potential variation both among different speakers and in the same speaker, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the language preferences and code-switching practices of these bilingual children as well as the community at large.

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