

The Patterning of Language Alternation in a Greek Supplementary School

Roxani Faltzi

University of Edinburgh

roxfaltzi@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper reports on the findings of a research project that explored language alternation patterns in a Greek supplementary school. Classroom interactions between bilingual in Greek and English pupils and the teacher were transcribed and then analysed based on Auer (1984, 2000) and Gafaranga's (1999, 2000, 2007) conversation analytic model. The key findings revealed that different organisational patterns of language alternation correspond to different functions. When the main purpose of interaction was language practice, the interlocutors adopted the Greek monolingual medium, whereas when language alternation was used for the establishment of interpersonal relations, the speakers adopted the bilingual medium.

Key words: supplementary schools, language alternation, organizational patterns, bilingual/monolingual medium.

1. Introduction

Multilingualism is an institutional or societal construct in that it refers to societies in which more than one language is available in all educational levels and institutions (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001: 4-5). Contrastingly plurilingualism, as defined by the CEFR, is used as an individual concept for the way individuals diversify their language use and switch between languages. Multilingualism is on the rise all over the world especially in countries with a growing number of immigrant populations, such as the USA and the UK. A significant number of community languages, meaning the languages spoken by minorities in 'inner-circle countries' (Kachru, 1985), are spoken worldwide. These days, there is a growing global awareness of the importance of the role of education in fostering the future bilingual and cross-cultural citizens. Therefore, the need to assist children in developing their skills in community languages has triggered a response among schools and international educational organizations.

Many European countries such as the Netherlands, Spain and Portugal have recognized this necessity. In Europe, both the European Union and the Council of Europe reviewed and expanded their already strong commitment to promoting language learning across Europe. In 2003, the European Commission committed itself to undertake 45 new actions to encourage national, regional and local authorities also to work for a major step change in promoting language learning and linguistic diversity. Moreover, projects such as the VALEUR Project and the Our Languages Project, initiatives supported by the European Center for Modern Languages (ECML) in Austria, investigated provision for community languages across Europe, aiming at helping different European countries share their experience about the most effective ways of supporting plurilingual pupils (McPake, 2007).

1.1 Supplementary Schools

Despite these recent efforts and the "official recognition of the languages of the new minorities, their status is uncertain, and they have largely been left to fend for themselves without any government support" (Martin, 2007: 496). The failure of the

mainstream education system to meet the needs of the ethnic minority children and their communities is what had originally triggered the rise of the supplementary school network.

Supplementary schools are “voluntary schools often called ‘community’ or ‘complementary’ schools which serve specific linguistic or religious and cultural communities, particularly through mother-tongue classes” (Creese & Martin, 2006:1). For nearly half a century, supplementary schools for ethnic minority children in the UK have been important sociopolitical and educational institutions (Wei, 2006). The first group of supplementary schools emerged in the late 1960s for children of Afro-Caribbean origin. Teaching the minority language was a key issue for the Afro-Caribbean schools as well as for the Muslim schools. The latter emerged in the late 1970s early 1980s and were the second wave of the supplementary schools movement. At the same time a number of other immigrant communities such as the Turkish, Chinese and Greek ones, established a significant number of supplementary schools aiming to maintain not only their language but also their cultural heritage.

2. Background

Despite the significance of these schools for the world’s minorities and for the wider societies, little is known about the learning and teaching practices of those institutions as well as about the actual interaction in the classrooms. The vast majority of studies on bilingual classroom discourse have drawn data from mainstream schools, focusing particularly on ‘code switching’, one of the most salient features of language use among multilingual/bilingual members.

‘Code switching’ has been defined as the alternate use of two or more languages in the same utterance or conversation (Gumperz, 1973). The exploration of the situated and sequential nature of the more formalized context of classroom discourse in bilingual settings has recently attracted the attention of researchers (Arthur, 1996; Martin, 1996; Martin, 1999; Ndayipfukamiye, 1996; Zentella, 1981). Studies of bilingual classroom discourse have identified and examined more the functions of language alternation¹. These could be summarized into 3 main categories (Ferguson, 2003):

1. *Code switching for curriculum access*, i.e. in order to facilitate pupils’ understanding of the subject matter of their lessons (Arthur, 1996; Martin, 1996, 1999; Ndayipfukamiye, 1996; Nussbaum, 1990; Zentella, 1981)
2. *Code switching for classroom management discourse*, i.e. to motivate, discipline and generally to draw students’ attention or to signal a change of footing (Arthur, 1996; Camilleri, 1996; Canagarajah, 1995; Lin, 1996; Merritt et al, 1992)
3. *Code switching for interpersonal relations*, i.e. to create more personal and social environment where teachers and students build rapport and negotiate their relationships and identities (Camilleri, 1996; Lin, 1996)

The amount of research literature concerning the patterns of this very act of alternating between two languages in the classroom discourse is rather scarce. Most studies have drawn data from mainstream bilingual schools. In a transitional bilingual programme in New York, the “follow the leader” pattern was observed, according to which learners always followed the teacher’s language choice (Zentella, 1981). Additionally, the

¹ In the literature the term *code switching* is a controversial one. To avoid ambiguity, henceforth I will use the term *language alternation* as a generic.

teachers' frequent switch to Setswana on question tags was shown in other studies (Arthur, 1996) as well as the L2-L1-L2 sequence according to which the teacher introduced a word or grammar point in English L2, he/she reiterated it in Cantonese (L1) and finally reinforced it back in English (Lin, 1996).

Studies on supplementary schools revealed many interesting findings that contrasted the patterns found in the mainstream bilingual schools. For instance, a study in the Gujarati supplementary school revealed that when the teacher initiated in Gujarati the students responded in English (Martin, Bhatt, Bhojani & Creese, 2006). Moreover, Arthur (2003) in her study of Somali literacy teaching in Liverpool indicated that switches from Somali to English served 'self-facilitative' functions assisting especially pupils with participating in the discourse continuously.

3. Aims and objectives

Two important factors led to the genesis of this study. First was the observation that language alternation had mainly been examined in classroom discourse mostly on the basis of identification of its functions (Arthur, 1996; Camilleri, 1996; Canagarajah, 1995; Lin, 1996; Martin, 1996; Merritt et al., 1992; Ndayipfukamiye, 1996; Zentella, 1981) and less on its patterns (Arthur, 1996; Lin, 1996; Ndayipfukamiye, 1996; Zentella, 1981). Secondly, the classroom context of supplementary schools-the role of which is significant to both minority communities and wider society-had scarcely been researched. Particularly, the dynamics of language alternation in bilingual classroom discourse were under-explored (Arthur, 1996; Martin et al., 2006). In light of the above observations, the aim of this study was the exploration of the situated and sequential nature of classroom discourse in a supplementary school.

The purpose of the present study was therefore to identify and examine the English-Greek language alternation patterns in the Greek language classroom discourse of the Greek supplementary school in Edinburgh, UK. In this paper, an attempt is made to answer the question of whether different functions of language alternation correspond to different organizational patterns. The main hypothesis was that there would be a correlation between English-Greek language alternation patterns and the functions they accomplished. More precisely, this paper explores the speakers' orientation to and interpretation of English-Greek language alternation patterns and provides an account for the orderliness of language alternation in the classroom discourse.

4. The study

4.1 The context of the study

Given the importance of supplementary schools for the minorities and for the wider communities as well as the dearth of research in this area, especially regarding the actual interaction in the bilingual classroom and the use of language alternation in the learning process, the Greek supplementary school in Edinburgh was chosen to carry out this study.

The school was established in 1996, funded by the Cyprus Education Authority (KEA). Its creation was initiated by the Honorary Consul of Greece in Scotland and six parents, with the aim of passing on the Modern Greek language to the bilingual children of Edinburgh's Greek community. The Greek school was recognized by the Greek government in 1998 and by the local government of Edinburgh in 2000. After many changes in its location, the school now shares the same roof as St Andrew's Greek Christian Orthodox Church, aided by the Ministry of Education of Cyprus and the Greek Red cross. The school is run by a board of volunteers. The St Andrew Greek School runs weekly from Tuesday to Friday. Classes are outside normal school hours

(after 4.30pm), they last for one or one and a half hours and take place once a week for each group of students. Given the low attendance rates, classes normally consist of three or four pupils and sometimes of only one or two.

4.2 Data collection and participants

The data for this study was drawn from over 25 hours of audio recorded lessons which were collected over a four-month period from March 2007 to June 2007. All lessons were transcribed², however, for the purpose of the study, which is qualitative and conversation-analytic, only six lessons were chosen. These were considered to provide us with the most interesting results for the study. The particular lessons involved three 14-year-old learners of a rather advanced level. The students were born in the U.K. They were attending high school in Edinburgh and were bilingual in Greek and English.

4.3 Methodological framework

The analysis was based upon the conversation analytic perspective developed by Auer (1984, 1998) and Gafaranga (2000) for the study of bilingual interaction. Following the Conversation Analysis emic perspective for an account of the orderliness of talk as a social action, the analyst's interpretational leeway is limited. In other words, examining the way bilingual speakers orient to any instances of language alternation and their own interpretation of what consists of a normative language choice and what does not is expected to reveal better results and add to our understanding of the factors producing different patterns of language alternation.

Taking into consideration that bilingual speakers cannot only communicate normatively in one language but in two languages, Gafaranga suggested a suspension of the notion of language and the adoption of the notion of medium. Gafaranga (2000) distinguishes between two broad categories, namely the monolingual and the bilingual medium. The latter consists of 3 different realisations, the 'parallel mode' (speaker A speaks language 1 and speaker B speaks language 2), the 'mixed mode' (speakers A and B alternate between languages 1 and 2 both and within calls) and the 'halfway-between mode' (speaker A consistently uses language 1 and speaker B alternates between languages 1 and 2). Gafaranga, denouncing Auer's position that order in talk is constructed turn by turn, states that talk-in-interaction has an 'overall order', meaning that languages as well as language alternation are aspects of an overall organisation of bilingual interaction.

5. Results and discussion

The key findings on which this discussion is based concern the patterns found when students initiated language alternation.

5.1 Evidence of a monolingual medium

The first extract shows one of the salient language alternation patterns identified in the data, when a student initiated language alternation. Following a reading comprehension task, the teacher is having a discussion with a student about the school marking system. The pattern follows the structure below and is exemplified in extract one.

² Transcription conventions are mainly in accordance with Gail Jefferson's transcript notation reported by Atkinson and Heritage (1999).

Pattern³ (1): P1/2 T1 P1Extract 1

1. P: In, ine ke ta dio, an (.) ise, kalo pedi (.) eh ke, kser, ke ise (.) em (.) ke: kseris ti (.) em (.) ti lei o, o daskalos sou giati (.) em (.) **he pay attention?**
2. T: prosehis
3. P: prosehis sta, sta mathimata, em ise em tha ise pio kalos ke em, ke tha tha ehis pio (.) **chance** (.) na paris
4. T: pio poles (.) pithanotites
5. P: pithanotites...

-
1. P: *It's, it's both, if (.) you are, a good child (.) eh and, and know, and you are (.) em (.) and: you know what (.) em (.) what your, your teacher says because (.) em (.) **he pay attention?***
 2. T: *you pay attention*
 3. P: *you pay attention at, at lessons, em you are em you will be better and em, and you will will have more (.) **chance** (.) to get*
 4. T: *more (.) chances*
 5. P: *chances...*

The above discussion is part of a speaking exercise. The main aim of this activity, apart from practicing communicative skills, is teaching Greek words and expressions. The default language is Greek and therefore the medium is considered monolingual. However, a student experiences some trouble in finding the *mot juste* and switches to English in turn one with the question 'he pay attention', inviting the teacher to repair that instance. The pause and the hesitation marker (em) that precedes the alternation give further evidence for the fact that the student is demanding a repair. The teacher provides the Greek word in turn two and the student repeats it in turn three showing understanding, and resumes talking in Greek. The student's repetition of the word in turn three is required at this part of the lesson because it is language practice. The same pattern is repeated later in the dialogue. It was also found to occur across turns.

Another recurrent pattern of student-initiated language alternation is illustrated in the following extract. Following a reading comprehension task, the students ask for unknown words and expressions and the teacher attempts to provide feedback. The pattern is illustrated below and exemplified further in the dialogue.

Pattern (2): T1 P2 T1 (+m.a.) P1 T1 P1Extract 2

1. P1: Ta ftei mia gineka(.) ti simeni afto?
2. T: Ta ftei mia gineka(.) fteo(.)
3. P2: **Means, I (.) it's her fault**
4. T: Ne, vevea tha protimousa na to eksigoume st' elinika

³ The capital letters stand for the speakers' turns and the numbers for the languages used. 1 stands for Greek whereas 2 stands for English. The slash between the numbers indicates a language alternation point within the same turn. Moreover, (+m.a.) shows that there is use of an expression like 'in Greek', whereas the parenthesis with (+m.a.) in bold shows the use of the expression 'in English'. The initials stand for the words 'metalinguistic' and 'awareness' respectively.

5. P2: Itan i
6. T: Ekane kati, as poume
7. P2 : diki tis lathos
8. T : Diko tis lathos (.) para poli orea, bravo Christine, etsi thelo na kanis, itan diko tis lathos, poli orea (.) ta ftei mia gineka, lathos mias ginekas
9. P1 : ne

-
1. P1: *It's a woman's fault (.) what does this mean?*
 2. T: *It's a woman's fault (.) it's my fault (.)*
 3. P2: **means, I (.) it's her fault**
 4. T: *yes, of course I would like us to explain this in Greek*
 5. P2: *it was the*
 6. T: *she did something, let's say*
 7. P2: *her fault*
 8. T: *her fault (.) very good, bravo Christine, this is the way I want you to do it, it was her fault, very good (.) it's a woman's fault, a woman's fault*
 9. P1: *yes*

In the beginning of the conversation, a student asks for the meaning of an unknown expression and the teacher repeats it in Greek along with the main unknown verb in turn two, requesting an answer. Another student gives the explanation in turn three showing understanding. However, the explanation is provided in English. The teacher in turn four accepts the explanation with a 'yes', but this is not sufficient as it is a language and not a content class. Although the teacher accepts the other language, she orients to this alternation as a deviance due to the purpose of this part of lesson, which is language practice. She thus initiates the repair stating explicitly that she would prefer the student to explain it 'in Greek'. This expression shows evidence of the teacher's effort to raise students' metalinguistic awareness. The students acknowledge the fact that they should use the L1 and with the teacher's help manage to explain the expression in Greek in turn seven. The acceptance and reiteration of the word come in turn eight where the teacher gives positive feedback to the student. The meaning of the word is found through the joint interaction between the teacher and student.

5.2 Evidence of a bilingual medium

So far the participants' own reactions and orientation to instances of language alternation showed that the base code of the conversation was monolingual. However, some other exchanges in the data showed evidence of the bilingual medium.

Pattern (3): T1 P1/2 T1 P1/2

Extract 3 This is a free discussion about school holidays.

1. T: [Stin Argentinini
2. P: tha paroun, **ferry**
3. T: [Ne
4. P: Sti **Georgia (.) and they're gonna stay there for a week (.)** ke: meta (.) tha paroun, to **ferry**, pali, sto (.) stin Antarktiki
5. T: Ne(0.2) se pia Georgia? Den katalava
6. P: **cause you know (.) like off (.) America they have a wee island Georgia**
7. T: Den to ksero afto to nisi (0.2) proti fora t'akouo

8. P: () Georgia

9. T: Etsi to lene? Den to ksero (.) ego ksero oti, epidi ston, ap'to Buenos Aires ginontousan poles ekdromes stin Antarktiki, boris na pas sto Buenos Aires...

1. T: *[In Argentina]*

2. P: *They will take, ferry*

3. T: *[Yes]*

4. P: *In Georgia (.) and they're gonna stay there for a week (.) and: then (.) they will take, the ferry, again, in (.) in Antarctica*

5. T: *Yes (0.2) in which Georgia? I didn't understand*

6. P: *cause you know (.) like off (.) America they have a wee island Georgia*

7. T: *I don't know that island (0.2) I've never heard it before*

8. P: () Georgia

9. T: *is that its name? I don't know it (.) I know that, because in, they made many trips from Buenos Aires to Antarctica, you can go to Buenos Aires...*

In this extract it is clear that while the teacher consistently uses Greek, the student alternates between the two languages within the same turn. Despite that, the teacher does not orient to the student's language alternation and the dialogue continues smoothly. Since extract 3 is part of an informal dialogue that departs from the teaching procedure, the participants orient to the adoption of the halfway mode bilingual medium as normative. This differs in turn six however, where the use of one language only replaces the alternate use of two. The student uses only English while the teacher continues speaking in Greek. The halfway mode is now replaced by the parallel mode. This use of a different bilingual mode might be because the student has realised from the teacher's reaction that this is an informal 'break' of the lesson. Presumably, the student is allowed to show a preference for the L2 and use English in this instance only. The purpose here is not language practice but rather communication itself and since this is accomplished bilingually, there is no need for a change to a monolingual medium. A further example of the parallel mode is shown in the extract below.

Pattern (4): P2 T1 P1

Extract 4 This is part of a discussion about Mother Teresa.

1. P: **no, I did a project on her, she went to Calcutta at first (.) to teach private children and then she saw the poor outside and then she wanted to teach**

2. T: *Aah! (.) alithia?*

3. P: *Ne*

1. P: **no, I did a project on her, she went to Calcutta at first (.) to teach private children and then she saw the poor outside and then she wanted to teach**

2. T: *Aah! (.) Really?*

3. P: *Yes*

The student has provided some very interesting information about Mother Teresa and that is not part of the teaching procedure anymore. It is rather an informal chat between teacher and students and that is the reason why the parallel mode of bilingual medium is adopted here.

6. Conclusion

Bilingual interaction in the classroom discourse of the Greek supplementary school in Edinburgh was analysed under the scope of the speakers' own orientation towards the instances of language alternation. The findings revealed that with regards to the use of English during the lessons, in this particular classroom context, the need for repairing or not the L2 element, must be understood with reference not only to the overall order of the conversation as Gafaranga (2000) has stated, but also to the 'vein' of the speech itself. The analysis of data has shown that a situation in this classroom cannot remain stable and consistent. Even in the formal context of the classroom, there are certain circumstances, which are more informal. Classroom discourse is comprised of different episodes. Some of them strictly adhere to the teaching procedure while others seem to depart from it, following a freer and more informal speech style. Consequently, in order to account for the orderliness of language alternation, all parts of classroom discourse should be separately considered, i.e. those that deviate from the teaching procedure and those that do not.

The analysis has shown a correlation between the previously identified (Ferguson, 2003) functions of language alternation and the patterns found in the current study. Thus, when the purpose was language practice speakers showed that the adopted medium of their interaction was monolingual. Contrastingly there were cases when language alternation functioned for interpersonal relations. In regards to the data pupils often evoked a change in the vein of speech that was followed by the teacher's positive reciprocation. The analysis of patterns showed that the interlocutors had adopted the bilingual medium for their interaction.

In conclusion, I argue that bilingual speakers revealed that without a common and agreed upon medium, their interaction would be disorderly. The way speakers orient themselves to language alternation, according to the context and vein of the interaction, portrays the orderliness of language alternation in the classroom discourse of this supplementary school. The orderliness of language alternation in my data offers insights into its significance and pedagogic potentials for the teaching and learning procedure. Capturing the dynamics of classroom language alternation is important because it can further our knowledge about the latter and assist with educational management concerns, language policies and teaching pedagogies. Further research along these lines is needed in order to compare the findings of the present study with other studies on supplementary or other bilingual classroom contexts.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr Joseph Gafaranga (Linguistics and English Language Department, The University of Edinburgh), the supervisor of my MSc thesis on which the present paper is based, for his valuable advice and support. Special thanks to the St Andrew Greek School in Edinburgh for participating in this study.

References

- Arthur, J. (1996). Code switching and Collusion: classroom interaction in Botswana primary schools. *Linguistics and Education*, 8:17-33.
- Arthur, J. (2003). Baro Afkaaga Hooyo! A case study of Somali Literacy teaching in Liverpool. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 6(3-4): 253-266.
- Atkinson J. M. & Heritage J., (1999). Jefferson's transcript notation. In: Jaworski A. and Coupland N. (Eds.), *The Discourse Reader*. London: Routledge, 158-166.

- Auer, P. (1984). *Bilingual Conversation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Auer, P. (1998). Introduction: Bilingual conversation revisited. In: Auer, P. (Ed.), *Code Switching in Conversation: Language, Interaction and Identity*, London: Routledge, 1-24.
- Auer, P. (2000). A conversation analytic approach to code switching and transfer. In: Li Wei (Ed.), *The Bilingualism Reader*. London and New York: Routledge, 166-187.
- Camilleri, A. (1996). Language Values and Identities: Code switching in secondary classrooms in Malta. *Linguistics and Education*, 8: 85-103.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (1995). Functions of code switching in ESL classrooms: socializing bilingualism in Jaffna. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 16(3): 173-195.
- Council of Europe. (2001). *The Common European Framework for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Creese, A. & Martin, P. (2006). Interaction in Complementary School Contexts: Developing Identities of Choice: An Introduction. *Language and Education*, 20 (1): 1-4.
- Ferguson, G. (2003). Classroom code switching in post-colonial contexts: Functions, attitudes and politics. In: Makoni, S. and Meinhof, U.H. (Eds.), *Africa and Applied Linguistics. AILA Review*, 16: 28-51. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Gafaranga, J. (1999). Language choice as a significant aspect of talk organization: The orderliness of language alternation. *TEXT: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse*, 19(2): 201-225.
- Gafaranga, J. (2000). Medium repair vs. other-language repair: telling the medium of a bilingual conversation. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 4: 327-350.
- Gafaranga, J. (2007). Code-switching as a conversational strategy. In: Auer, P. & Li Wei (Eds.), *Handbook of Multilingualism and Multilingual Communication*. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Gumperz, J. (1973, April). The communicative competence of bilinguals: some hypotheses and suggestions for research. *Language in Society*, 2(1):143-154.
- Kachru, B. (1985). Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: the English language in the outer circle. In: Quirk, R. and Widdowson, H. (Eds.), *English in the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lin, A.(1996). Bilingualism or linguistic segregation? Symbolic domination, resistance and code-switching. *Linguistics and Education*, 8 (1): 49-84.
- McPake, J. (2007). *One country, one voice... but with many languages*. The Scotsman, 30 May 2007. Edinburgh: The Scotsman Publications Ltd, 48-49.
- Martin, P. W. (1996). Code switching in the primary classroom: one response to the planned and the unplanned language environment in Brunei. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 17 (2-4): 128-144.
- Martin, P. W. (1999). Close encounters of a bilingual kind: interactional practices in the primary classroom in Brunei. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 19: 127-140.
- Martin, P. (2007). Multilingualism of new minorities (in migratory contexts). In: Auer, P. and Li Wei (Eds.), *Handbook of Multilingualism and Multilingual Communication*. Berlin. New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 493-507.
- Martin, P., Bhatt, A., Bhojani, N. & Creese, A. (2006). Managing Bilingual Interaction in a Gujarati Complementary School in Leicester. *Language and education*, 20 (1): 5-22.
- Merritt, M., Cleghorn, A., Abagi, J.O. & Bunyi, G. (1992). Socializing multilingualism; determinants of code switching in Kenyan primary classrooms. *Journal of Multilingualism and Multicultural Development*, 13(1-2): 103-121.
- Ndayipfukamiye, L. (1996). The contradictions of teaching bilingually in post- colonial Burundi: From Nyakatsi to maisons en'Etage. *Linguistics and Education*, 8: 35-47.
- Nussbaum, L. (1990). Plurilingualism in foreign language classes in Catalonia. *Papers from the workshop on the impact and consequences of code switching(European Science Foundation Network on Code-switching and Language Contact*. European Science Foundation, Strasbourg, France, 141-163.
- Wei , L. (2006). Complementary Schools: Past, Present and Future. *Language and Education*, 20 (1): 76-83.
- Zentella, A. C. (1981). *Ta bien*, you could answer me *en cualquier idioma*: Puerto Rican code switching in bilingual classrooms. In: Duran, R. (Ed.), *Latino language and communicative behavior*, Norwood, N. J.: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 109-132.