



English as a Third Language (L3) in Greek State Schools: Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions

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Abstract

Our era has witnessed the expansion of the European Union which led various people to move to different countries in search of new opportunities. As a result, the influx of migrants and refugees has transformed the Greek society into a multicultural mosaic. Hence, cultural as well as linguistic pluralism is now a reality worldwide and issues of second / third language acquisition phenomena are becoming more and more pertinent to the Greek as well as the international educational contexts.

In this light, this paper provides an overview of 'bilingualism' and 'trilingualism' and the general role of the first in the teaching and learning of English as a third language (L3), regarding the public primary education in Greece. In particular, it reports on the general findings of a qualitative study (case study) regarding two Albanian students attending the fourth class in a Greek state primary school. Being bilingual learners themselves, this study aimed to identify their overall scope, attitudes and performance of theirs when it comes to learning English as a third language.

The present paper first aims to shed light on those particular practices- based on and mingled with relative research- which were conducive to successful learning and secondly provides snapshots of teaching English as an additional language (EAL) to bilingual learners. Moreover, this paper conveys the uniqueness of real individuals and situations based on the researcher's point of view and puts forward ways to improve the existing quality of teaching English as a third language in the primary school context.

The research tools used for the specific article are limited to the bilinguals' personal practices and the researcher's personal reflection. Generally, the results of the study indicate that the bilinguals' advantages outweigh those of monolinguals and based on the theoretical framework along with the empirical insights, the need for meticulous attention and careful consideration- regarding third language acquisition strategies and teaching methods- is highlighted.

1. Introduction

Greece, as many other European countries, has experienced large immigrant inflows transforming it in multi-ethnic mosaic. This is mainly due to its prime geographical position, the easily crossed borders and the nature of the family-based economy that increased the cheap immigrant labor dramatically. Therefore, due to the increasing mobility, multilingual classrooms are becoming the norm rather than the exception in many EU countries. In Greece, a great number of educators experience recurrent phenomena of bilingual learners, acquiring English as a third language in various contexts. The paper under discussion- which is part of a wider longitudinal research- draws on examples of two bilingual students learning English as L3 and by peering into their educational growth (through observations, questionnaires, self reflected journals and various activities) attempts are made to realize the extent to which intercultural education responds to their needs. It is also analyzed whether the attitudinal variables or the ones directly linked to formal learning are the most important when it comes to bilinguals' acquisition of L3, so as to put suggestions forward for surpassing potential difficulties and improving third language learning in Greek schools.

2. Bilingualism - Trilingualism

Nowadays, according to a report issued by "Eurydice" / "Eurostat", English is the most widely taught foreign language in nearly all European countries. Being the lingua franca, its spread in Europe has had strong influences on other languages and various forms of societal and individual bilingualism or even trilingualism which resulted from language contact, emerged (Cenoz, J.& Jessner, U., 2000).

Broadly speaking, bilingual and multilingual education are generic terms that refer to the use of two or more languages in instructional settings; however, the study of 'trilingualism' is relatively new and the two types are subsumed under the term 'bilingualism' since the first is considered an extension of the latter. Regarding "trilingualism", the European Commission uses the term 'multilingual education' to refer to its policy of "mother tongue plus two other languages for all" (European Commission, 2003 in Garcia, O.2009). Likewise, UNESCO adopted the term 'multilingual education' in 1999 in the General

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Conference Resolution 12 to refer to the use of at least three languages, L1, a regional or national language and an international language in education (UNESCO,2003 in Garcia.O, 2009).

3. Intercultural Education in Greece

The general legislation as well as the implementation of Intercultural Education is of high importance when it comes to third language learning, as it is highlighted in the Cross Thematic Curriculum Framework, introduced by the Greek Pedagogical Institute (GPI) in 2000. The framework focuses on the preservation of our national awareness on the one hand, and the development of European citizenship acknowledgment, on the other.

Palaiologou (2004) mentions that it was not until 1996 that Greece took the initial step towards addressing the issues pertaining to “intercultural education” through the Law 2413 / 96 which set the foundations for the intercultural education. As a result, Redeem Education policies were implemented according to which *Reception or Tutorial classes*, which offer after school tuition, were set up first in gymnasiums and lyceums in the 1980s and in 2005-6 in Primary education, in an attempt to meet diversified needs of such students. What is more, intercultural schools were established financed by the European Union for Muslim children, Repatriated – foreign students and Gypsy children (Palaiologou, 2004) and during the years 2006-2007, there have been 76 ‘remedial classes’ set up for Roma children.

Also, some community funding programs have been implemented; a case in point is the “Education of immigrant and repatriated students” program- funded by the European Union and implemented from 2010 to 2014 by the Aristotle University. Finally, regarding migratory educational policies, with the implementation of the new Law 3386/10 in 2010, the Greek citizenship can be given to legal immigrants who meet specific criteria.

4. Findings

The research findings portray scarce glimpses of real life situations when teaching EAL to bilingual learners, which serve as an initiative to improve the current educational situation. Both learners attribute deficiencies to both their L1 and L2, considering their L3 the most difficult language. They also believe that L3 acquisition would be much easier if the teacher used their L1, so as to exemplify various things in their native language. Moreover, when tested in “phonology” they stated their L1 resembles more the English phonemic system; thus, the perceived typological distance between the three languages may also have been a major factor for *code shifting*, either due to lexical needs or to refer to mere communicative functions.

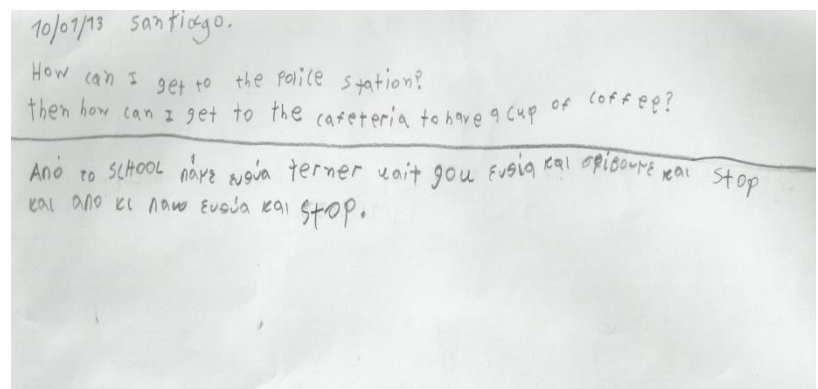
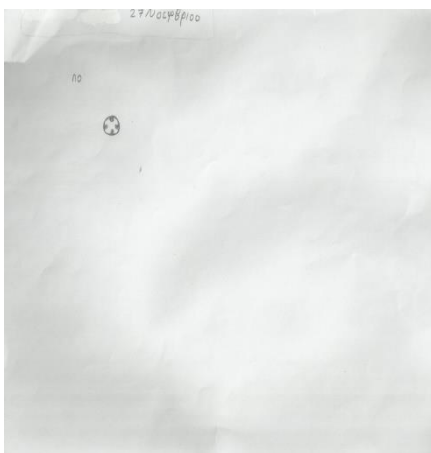
According to Garrett and Young (2009), the most influential are the *affective factors* related to the learners’ attitudes and emotions. This was the case in the given study, since there has been a dramatic progress of both bilinguals dictated by two main things: *scaffolding and motivation* - both “integrative” (intrinsic), and “instrumental” (extrinsic).According to Krashen’s ‘Affective Filter Hypothesis’, various affective variables can relate to success in second and therefore third language acquisition in a classroom. In this case, children had no enhanced bi-literacy, so modifications like reinforcers, the amount of guidance offered to children (scaffolding), along with body language, turned data into ‘comprehensible input’ and consisted contributing factors in influencing the frequency of use of the target language.

In line with the above and regarding the teaching procedures used- that proved really helpful in a mixed classroom- all lessons carried out during the observations were learner-centered, not focusing exclusively on the textbook which contained drilling based tasks. By presenting a video on the net of different customs and creating a poster of “proverbs around the world” I tried –even in the least- to break down any ‘cultural conflicts’ that may have emerged, allowing learners to attach images to words that they may not have comprehended otherwise. They found it really enjoyable bringing up issues about other cultures and they considered their own culture as something relative and not absolute, by looking at it more critically.



I also tried to plan the linguistic component of forthcoming tasks (*advance preparation*), translate in L2 as a basis for the understanding of the L3 or make them guess the meaning either by showing or gesticulating (*inference*). I have also made use of TPR activities and helped learners relate new information to already established concepts or use the latter to acquire new one (*elaboration-transfer*) (Papalexatou, 2013). A closer look at the bilinguals' progress of their "classroom artifacts", will certainly attest to the fact that all the aforementioned variables in this case of trilinguals, did work.

(*Journal Writing Samples*)



5. Pedagogical implications - Suggestions

In light of the above and given the current educational system in Greece, not only should existing educational practices be validated and decrees put into effect, but it is also urgent to point the way towards improvement. Various instances in the case study highlight the students' need to make use of their L1 for a better grasp of the additional language since their ethnic identity is not encouraged and they have to be immersed in a classroom exclusively tailored to monolingual students' needs. According to the "Interdependence Hypothesis", literacy in L1 correlates with L2 literacy level and it is therefore conducive to additional language learning. Moreover, as Cummins (2000) states, while learning a native language a child acquires a set of skills and meta-linguistic knowledge that can be drawn upon when learning another additional language; as he maintains, if the conceptual knowledge has been developed in L1, then the input in another language will be much more comprehensible. Besides, the use of native languages by teachers and students alike has been associated with better skills and general well being in schools. (Chang et al, 2007). Regarding Greece, according to Mitakidou, S & Tressou, E.(2009) there is a "mother tongue maintenance" law, which holds that the culture and language of the children's country of origin can be taught as an optional subject (Φ/10/20/Γ1/708/7-9-1999). However, as they state, there is a gap between the letter of the law and the actual implementation in Greece.

The same applies to all the policies that have been addressed to immigrant students so far, since everything has proven insufficient in every day practice.



What is of major importance is not only the teaching of immigrant students' home/minority languages or the design of suitable curricula implemented by specialized staff; it's also about providing all children with "equal opportunities" and "abandoning the ethnocentric character of knowledge and traditional forms of educational policy formation and control which still persists" (Zambeta, 2000: 63, quoted in Palaiologou, 2012).

Therefore, it is time the teaching system in Greece took its point of departure in issues relevant to multiculturalism that go hand in hand with our era. First and foremost, the effective integration of immigrant children is best achieved through the provision of constant linguistic and contextual input, even though it is probable for children not to utter a word in the early stages; understanding always comes first – at least in their own context. Responding positively to any form of children's communication along with good quality support materials and innovative teaching methods is a prerequisite towards mastery of the additional language. Therefore, appropriate amendments should take place within the context of entire school settings through appropriate materials to help them make the substantial cross referencing in the three languages. Teacher education programs should also empower teachers and engage them so as to be able to address the needs of language minority students, boost their self esteem and incorporate them in the classroom. Specialized teachers – possibly ones with a migration background- should be hired or the existing ones should be provided with adequate in-service ongoing training seminars on practical and cross-thematic methodological instances, so as to gain a sound knowledge of intercultural education that will in turn lead to the reinforcement of relationships between native parents and the wider school community, the improvement of school attainment of all immigrants and the prevention of school failure that has lately been on the rise.

Overall, research in Greece is all the more showing that the arrival of migrant children is accompanied by adversities and although there is a comprehensive legislative framework provided for intercultural education which has paved the way, actual practices really fail. Although the realization of the aforementioned thoughts is a really daunting task- given the current economic crisis Greece faces- coordinated actions could help such principles be diffused within the curricula, especially if both the government and educators kept an eye on international successful trilingual educational programs.

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