SOCIALIZATION THROUGH TEACHER TALK IN AN ENGLISH BILINGUAL CLASS

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the language practices of a teacher in an English bilingual class. The children were learning English in Year One of elementary school. The teacher consistently spoke English with the children. The description of the teacher's talk shows how she used English for classroom management, for instructions, for teaching subject content and for personal exchanges. The analysis reveals the significance of ongoing classroom activities for language learning. English was spoken in contexts familiar to students and consistent with and coherent with school practices. Students heard and observed English as part of normal classroom activities. English was embedded in the social practices of classroom encounters. The paper proposes that children's experiences of classroom talk socialize them into the discourses of classroom activities and of school subjects. The children learnt English through observation and participation. This was a process of apprenticeship into using English for making meaning in social practices. From this perspective, the children were learning to mean in English through their participation in the social practices of the class.

UDC & KEYWORDS

■ UDC: 81-11 ■ Socialization ■ Social practices ■ Teacher talk ■ Bilingual teaching

INTRODUCTION

One of the reasons for the preoccupation of teachers and researchers with classroom talk is its formative role in initiating learners into discourse conventions of schooling and thereby of society. Classrooms are structured environments for participation in language-mediated social practices. Instruction in schools is predominantly carried out with language. Children learn to understand and produce spoken and written texts associated with classroom activities. They learn to follow spoken and written instructions and to select discourses appropriate to different activities. In first-language classrooms students share language experiences that are the foundation for instruction in discourses needed for classroom work. Second-language learners face different conditions. Although they have valuable prior experiences in their first language(s), the classroom is a vital although contested environment for building discourse resources in an additional language 1.

Psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic studies in second-language (L2) acquisition have made us aware of the centrality of learners' communicative experiences for learning additional languages. Classroom experiences comprise important learning environments. Krashen emphasized the importance of comprehensible input - the need for learners to understand what was said for language to be processed for integration into their developing interlanguages. Long identified the importance of interaction and negotiation of meaning for language development. He proposed a role for second language learners' output or language production for the development of accuracy in language use activity. Recent second-language learning

research has extended the second-language acquisition model of input-interaction-output to include sociocultural activities with a particular interest in how experienced speakers scaffold learners' speech.

The bilingual class

The bilingual class discussed in this paper was set up to promote children's learning of English as an additional language in preference to instruction in English as a second-language programme. As half of the primary school curriculum was taught in English. In this paper I characterise bilingual classes as those in which content subjects, which are a part of a school's curriculum, are taught in the target language. In bilingual classes children take part in the curriculum practices of schooling. Classroom routines are conducted in a target language, and the use of language for social purposes is observable.

Classroom talk in second - and foreign-language programs has been criticised for its limitations in providing authentic speech opportunities for the development of learners' language proficiency. Although communication is accepted generally as the goal of L2 instruction, second-language classrooms are considered poor environments for authentic spoken interaction and for development of communication skills. It is claimed that 'classroom discourse, based on eclectic communicative approach, which relies entirely on message for promoting language learning is unrealistic and unachievable.' It has been documented the negative impact of macrolevel factors such as national examinations, curriculum guidelines, set textbooks and school expectations Teachers' talk dominates, which gives little time for learners to use the target language and almost no opportunity for the negotiation of meaning.

In contexts where teachers' proficiency is low and their ability to negotiate meanings is restricted, learners' participate in limited, if any, verbal exchanges of meaning. With limited discourse resources, learners resort to speaking a shared first language or to parroting artificial dialogues.

In response to criticisms, textbook writers have adopted methods, such as communicative language teaching, that attempt to authenticate schoolroom interactions by introducing scenarios imitating discourses in settings outside of classrooms. The scenarios construct learners as tourists, as customers, or as business people pretending to encounter native speakers in their home country. These scenarios lack authenticity because they are essentially focused on learners as actors and language as object rather than on the exchange of meanings. The central issue is that language learning is learning to mean, and the learning of meanings involves participation in meaning-making events. Against this background, bilingual programmes are of interest for the conditions they set up for learning to mean without contrived dialogues and tasks.

The importance of classroom talk

There is an alternative analysis to the shortcomings of classrooms as contexts for language learning. It considers

the value of classroom language for learners' observation of, and participation in, second language use in action this analysis views classroom language as institutional discourse with significant and established social functions. As with institutional talk generally, the classroom has socially determined language patterns for the realisation of social purposes or functions. The school curriculum and school activities are designed to broaden learners' experiences of the structured discourses of social life, as well as initiating them into new discourse patterns for social participation in new relationships, activities and curriculum practices.

Speech events in classrooms are prime time for initiating learners into differentiated and appropriate language uses, which are functionally integrated into the routine and predictable events of class work. Language use is not imported or extraneous to what is going on in class, but is linked to and inseparable from the functioning of a class community. Halliday states that text 'springs from its environment and is determined by the specific features of the environment.' Language use relates to social function, with meaning potential encoded through lexicogrammatical and discourse-semantic selections. A teacher's conduct of classroom business in a target language is a potentially rich source of meaning-making language experiences for learners, because the established relationships between social practices and language use enable learners to comprehend and take part in communication. Although the exclusive use of a target language is disputed Learners see and hear teachers' physical expressions in the L2 linked to behaviour and to the material environment. The interpenetration of language and classroom activities is modelled in teacher talk. Children develop their comprehension and use of discourse through engagement with predictable language routines Teachers with adequate proficiency in the target language adjust their talk to support learners' comprehension of what is going on. They modify their speech through the selection of familiar syntax and lexis and through adjustments to the speed of speech. They support or scaffold children's participation through rephrasing and introducing alternative and new expressions. Classrooms in fact are environments with potential to engage learners in a wide range of language experiences.

Language use in bilingual classes

In her review of bilingual classroom interaction, Martin-Jones identifies three dimensions of classroom discourse: the ways in which meanings are negotiated moment by moment; the way cultural congruence is accomplished; and recurring patterns of codeswitching indicative of social and political contexts. Her review highlights the significance of social practices and cultural contexts for language use and choice in bilingual programmes. Duff records how social and political changes have an impact on language socialization in bilingual classes. What is of particular value in these studies is the attention to learners' experiences of patterns of behaviour linked to language choices in a process of socialization. Willett in her ethnographic account of the second-language socialisation of first graders describes the way children learned to participate in interactional routines embedded in classroom events. The predictable exchanges in the events provided models for the children's participation. She notes that by 'engaging in the sociocultural practices of the group, newcomers gradually appropriate the languaculture needed to be considered an insider' she adopts the term languaculture to emphasize that language and culture are inextricably entwined. This is evident in studies of codeswitching in bilingual programmes.

The studies on interaction in bilingual classes suggest the value for language acquisition of immersion in routine language practices. The present study examines a bilingual class as a language socialisation environment for young children. Bilingual programmes teach content, which is learning the discourses associated with the practices of school subjects. Language and content are not separated, nor is function differentiated from form. Teachers and learners use a target language to carry out social functions of school subjects. The practices of bilingual classes socialise learners into uses of text types or discourses that constitute subject content. The recording of a teacher at work in a bilingual class enables us to study the functions of teacher talk and its potential contribution to language learning. In particular it provides some insights into the social function of what happens in class and how language use relates to the social practices of subject-specific classroom behaviors.

The analysis of classroom talk is based on data collected as part of the evaluation of an English bilingual program in an Albanian School. The bilingual class was for Grade One children. The evaluation took place in the first year of the programme. The school had organised information sessions for teachers and parents in the year prior to the commencement of the programme, so they were well informed about the nature and purpose of the programme. Parents made the decision for their children to join the programme. The class had 12 children. Only one child had some English language experience. Most of the children spoke Albanians their first language.

The approach was considered appropriate because the distinguishing feature of bilingual programmes compared with second language programmes is the use of the target language for subject content instruction. Discourse analysis focused on utterances embedded in social interaction, with the emphasis on language in use rather than on segregated grammatical and lexical features.

The social functions of teacher's talk

A characteristic of second-language programmes is the dominance of teacher talk, Chaudron. From the beginning of the study the researchers noted the almost exclusive use of English by the teacher: she used English as a matter of course for instruction and in her interactions with the children. The teacher was the native speaker in a program in which English was used as the medium of instruction. Although the teacher used some Albanian in Term 1, by Term 2 this was the exception. She spoke English in a relaxed and natural manner with the children in class and out of class, including in the lunch break, the first part of which was under her supervision.

The teacher taught with the consistent and confident expectation that the class would understand her and be able to follow her instructions and be able to interact with her in English. In her interactions with the children she did not expect them to use English. She accepted their responses in English, but replied to them in English when addressed in Albanian. This was appropriate for beginners whose resources for expression were still limited and whose comprehension capacities were being developed the teacher commented:

There is no pressure placed upon the children to use the second language. However, words and phrases used by them are welcomed with enthusiasm and praise. Responses in English are simply turned into Italian without any negativity towards the child. If a child makes a grammatical error it is simply corrected by repeating the

phrase correctly. I do not want the children to feel any sense of failure which might in the long run inhibit the development of their second language. When the children are ready they will begin to speak. (Teacher's report).

When the teacher provided specific input on a new topic or introduced new language items she asked children to repeat them after her in English and on these occasions expected the children to respond in English. The same was expected for class routines, such as seeking permission to go to the toilet. As the teacher spoke predominantly in English, the children were exposed to a wide range of language, both subject specific and as part of normal classroom interactions. The teacher used English primarily for four social purposes:

- For classroom management,
- for giving instructions,
- for social interaction,
- for teaching subject content.

The teacher used English for management of students' activities and behaviour. The following extract shows how she used English for organizing a classroom activity. She asked the children to get together with their partners.

Faleminderit Ana, tani bashkohuni me partneret special, ju lutem! Andi, mos e prek hunden!

Thank you Ana, now get together with special partner, please! Andi, don't pick your nose!

Ana bashkohuni ju lutem. Ku jane partneret tuaj?

Ana get together please! Where are your partners?

Hajde, bashke!

Come on, together!

Her instructions were in the context of previous activities and related to the children taking action to locate and join their partners. She addressed the whole class and individual children to gain attention. She repeated her instruction four times, each time using a different form, but repeating key words and phrases that had become familiar to the children through frequent use in the programme. The use of repetition served three purposes: to gain children's attention, to organise the children for the first phase of the lesson and to assist their understanding of the teacher's directions. The teacher also commented on children's behaviour. She reprimanded and praised children in English. For misbehavior children were sent to *qoshja e te menduarit* (the thinking corner). Class rules were developed and displayed in English. These rules for maintenance of classroom order were explained and reinforced through repetition. The language of management was directed at the whole class as well as at individual children, and usually required children's responses in some action, which was a means of checking their understanding. In this extract the children showed their understanding by moving to their desks with their partners.

The teacher used English for giving routine instructions. The routines and classroom rituals governed children's movements and behaviour in class. The routines included commands to bring the children to order quickly:

Nje, dy, tre, kater, pese-duart ne koke. Mira shikome.

One, two, three, four, five - Hands on heads. Mira, look at me!

Femije shikoni!

Children, look!

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The extract contains four linguistic routines to get the children's attention:

- Counting to give the children time to attend to the teacher,
- a physical response from the children to manifest their compliance – *Duart ne koke*. (Hands on the head),
- the call for one child to look at '*zonjen*' (lady) to attract the attention of one child,
- repetition of the verb '*shikoni*' (look at me) to attract the attention of the whole class.

The English used for class management was extensive. Management routines familiarized students with English referents for general classroom behaviours. They gave children regular exposure to a range of expressions to do with the movement, behaviour and functioning of the class. The children had frequent opportunities for observing and responding to the teacher's directions in the context of normal classroom practices.

The use of English for giving instructions was a significant feature of the teacher's spoken language. She gave instructions for introducing new activities and for giving directions on how to carry them out. The teacher explained how to do things, to make things, to record activities. The instructions were related to the subject matter she was teaching. The teacher spoke English primarily for teaching subject content. The teacher had established routines, which gave her opportunities for repeated use of certain discourse patterns that constituted subject areas. The integration of religion into the life of the class offered opportunities for the children to engage in religious routines in English. Prayers were said before the lunch break, from which point in the lesson the following extract is taken. Just prior to this exchange the teacher had walked to the front of the class and sat facing the class, her usual position for whole class work, with children sitting on the carpet in front of her. Her movements and verbal command ('everybody sits down \ *te gjithë te ulur*') signaled to the class to join her.

The routines of prayer time were predictable. The commencement of prayers was marked by '*Duart te bashkuara*' (hands tied) and the teacher asking the children to choose a prayer as she pointed to printed prayer options pinned on the wall. The children selected one printed on a pink chart. They sang the pray together. The teacher reprimanded a boy for not paying attention and asked him to make the sign of the cross [How do you make the sign of the cross?].

Mary, si behet shenja e kryqit?

Outside of the classroom the teacher spoke with the children in English. This extended the use of English beyond the classroom to the wider social context. The children responded to the teacher as though speaking English was quite natural.

Everyday classroom talk in the bilingual class immersed children in rich and varied uses of English. The teacher consistently spoke English with the class for purposes of management and instruction, for teaching content and more informally in personalised and individual interactions with children. One of the aims of the bilingual programme was the development of children's comprehension of English. She used a variety of strategies to make it comprehensible. They included:

- Presenting new subject matter in contexts with visuals, speech and physical demonstrations,
- drawing children's attention to specific lexical items using texts, body language and visuals,

- making reference to children's experiences,
- responding to children's comments and requests in context,
- using classroom routines for repetition and introduction of new language items.

In Grade One the children were learning to take part in the social practices of school. Although activities were conducted in English, the children experienced this as normal. When describing what they did in class for the newcomers, they recalled activities rather than language. Children's attention was on participation in the events of the class, so that they experienced English as a natural part of classroom work. They were learning practices and meanings of teacher's instructions and directions together with the meanings of Religion, Society and Environment, and Health and Science. This was a process of socialization through participation in English-mediated social practices.

The analysis of the teacher's spoken English provides insights into conditions for language development in bilingual classes. The outstanding feature of the bilingual class was the involvement of learners in the social practices that are normal for classroom teaching. English was linked to and aligned with particular social behaviours. Children learned textual conventions in English for realization of social purposes, such as joining in shared book reading, completing a worksheet, saying prayers, following and giving instructions. The realization of social purposes and language were not separated. It was not necessary for the teacher or the children to invent tasks or activities for authentic interaction. As the teacher reported, the children were experiencing discourses typical of practices for Grade One.

Conclusion

Classrooms are social environments for the apprenticeship and socialization of children into discourses for realizing new socio-cultural purposes. Learning another language is learning to mean using an additional linguistic code. As children join in the tasks of the curriculum they enlarge their meaning potential to perform specific functions and achieve technical goals using the semiotic potential of acquired, and of additional, discourse resources. The analysis of language use in bilingual classes suggests an interpretation of learning additional languages as a process of socialization or apprenticeship into communities of practice (Bayle & Schechter, Block). Through participation in the social practices of the school and of the curriculum, children learn to mean with discourses integrated in practical classroom work.

Although the focus in this paper has been on bilingual teaching, the analytical framework applies to the study of learning in foreign- and second-language programmes as well. Whether a class is learning an additional language or other subjects such as geography or social sciences, the practices of teachers induct learners into classroom behaviours and into roles as subject specialists. English language use was a natural part of classroom practices.

The daily, repetitive talk of the teacher in this study contributed to the development of children's comprehension skills, as well as modelled English for their interactions with one another. During the year's observation of children and teacher at work in the classroom, we noted the increasing confidence of children's participation in the English community of practice, as over time they responded to and appropriated the discourses needed for daily work. Although English was not the language of the wider school community in which it was located, within the enclave of the classroom,

children experienced English as their language of communication, not as a foreign or additional language, but as their resource for making meanings.

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