"She is a very good child but she doesn’t speak": The invisibility of children’s bilingualism and teacher ideology

Anastasia Gkaintartzti *, Roula Tsokalidou

School of Early Childhood Education, Faculty of Education, University Campus, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 541 24 Thessaloniki, Greece

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 6 November 2009
Received in revised form 31 May 2010
Accepted 7 September 2010

Keywords:
Bilingualism
Language ideologies
Albanian minority children
Greek teachers

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the micro-level ideologies of four teachers in mainstream Greek schools concerning linguistic diversity, bilingualism, second language learning and minority language maintenance. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the teachers and observations in the school context which focused on their views and attitudes concerning the presence of Albanian background children in their classrooms and the way the Greek school responds to the children’s bilingualism and to linguistic diversity. Thus, we attempt to bring to the surface aspects of the broader language ideologies which underlie their school practices. Teachers’ responses could be placed on a continuum ranging from awareness of the importance of bilingualism and minority language maintenance to the absolute rejection of the minority language and the subtraction of bilingualism.

© 2010 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Teacher attitudes towards bilingualism and language diversity are part of the language ideologies which underlie their language practices. Their assumptions about second language teaching, bilingualism, the relative value of languages and the way schools respond to diversity are central to their language policy making and to the shaping of their everyday teaching practices (Skilton-Sylvestre, 2003). Looking into teachers’ views and their underlying ideologies concerning languages on a micro-level is very important as they represent a layer of language policy making and planning and affect school contexts (Ricento and Hornberger, 1996).

1.1. Language ideology

The notion of ideology is thoroughly studied and discussed by scholars working in the area of Critical Discourse Analysis such as Van Dijk (1996, 1998) and Fairclough (1989). Van Dijk (1996:8) argues that ideologies are the foundation of the social beliefs shared by a social group and that group members use ideologies to "guide their interpretations, discourses and other social practices in a specific social domain, for instance, in race relations", stressing their complex, diverse, cognitive and social nature. Moreover, language ideology has been defined in many different ways (Woolard, 1998). According to Martínez-Roldán and Malavé (2004:161) "it is a term through which the notion of ideology is linked to language or discourse to characterize the development of beliefs and attitudes towards the learning and use of a particular language". Therefore, teachers’ language ideologies include their views and attitudes towards bilingualism and language learning, as schools can be viewed as highly diverse social contexts and “particularly revealing sites” (Heller, 1999:337) of struggle among different
groups and competing ideologies. Language ideologies, as a construct that emerged from linguistic anthropology (Schieffelin et al., 1998) are defined by Silverstein (1979: 173) as "sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived structure and use". Such a definition may help us study and understand teachers' beliefs about (minority) language use and second language teaching and learning focusing on the political and ideological load of their beliefs which is directly related to issues of power relations between different linguistic resources.

1.2. Research on teachers' attitudes towards diversity and the Greek educational setting

Teachers' dispositions towards minority students and their background relate directly to the effective instruction of minority children (Ball and Lardner, 1997). Research on teachers' attitudes towards minority languages has revealed that teachers who have not received training in second language teaching do not see a role for themselves and for schools in minority language maintenance perceiving it as the sole responsibility of immigrant parents (Lee and Oxelson, 2006). Studies on teachers' attitudes towards linguistic diversity have also revealed a discrepancy in their views which tend to be positive towards the theoretical aspects of bilingual education and native language instruction but appear less positive towards the practical implementation of these principles in the classroom (Ramos, 2001; Mora, 1999; Shin and Krashen, 1996). Research has also shown that teachers' negative attitudes towards linguistic and cultural diversity can be brought about by perceived difficulties in dealing with it in the classroom (Dooley, 2005). Moreover, studies have documented the negative consequences of first language loss and the subtraction of bilingualism (Lambert, 1974) concerning the children's language, cognitive, social and psychological development as well as the role of widespread negative perceptions of bilingualism, which can lead to the bilingual children's disempowerment at school (Cummins, 2000, 2001; Baker, 1996; Wong Fillmore, 1991).

During the last decade, Greek school classrooms have become highly diverse since almost 10% of the total student population is immigrant pupils, a great number of whom are of Albanian background (IPODE, 2006). In response to this challenge, the Greek state has introduced 'tutorial' and 'reception' classes in schools, followed by the legislative framework of 'Greek Education abroad, Intercultural Education and other provisions', which led to the establishment of intercultural schools to be attended mostly by immigrant and repatriated students. Despite the official policy makers' discourse, the prevailing educational policies and practices are still oriented towards the linguistic and cultural assimilation of immigrant students, the latter experiencing academic and other school-related problems and often being subject to discrimination and negative school attitudes (Skourtou et al., 2004; UNICEF, 2001; Nikolaou, 2000).

1.3. Research on Greek teachers' attitudes

Research on Greek teachers' views regarding linguistic diversity has attested to the existence of commonplace assumptions about the learning and adaptation problems of the minority students and their belief that their presence creates difficulties to the academic progress of the class (Skourtou et al., 2004; Skourtou, 2002; UNICEF, 2001; Bombas, 1996). The majority of the teachers revealed their incapability to respond to issues of diversity in their classrooms and their need for further training (Skourtou et al., 2004; Skourtou, 2002). The teachers' documented lack of awareness of issues related to bilingualism is also revealed in their use of the term 'bioglōsia peida' (that is 'other language-speaking children') to refer to non-native, bilingual children, a practice which has important ideological and educational repercussions to the bilingual students' lives in and out of the school context (Tsokaliou, 2005). Although teachers have in general positive attitudes towards bilingualism and minority language instruction, they are not aware of its benefits for the children's second language and academic development and consider bilingualism as a human right which is however not related to the process of school learning (Skourtou et al., 2004; Skourtou, 2002). The dominant belief and practice revealed from research is discouraging immigrant parents from using their first language at home in order to maximise exposure to the Greek language and enhance its development (Gogonas, 2007; Kassimi, 2005; Skourtou et al., 2004; Skourtou, 2002). All in all, research has revealed discrepancies and a degree of confusion in Greek teachers' views concerning linguistic diversity which emphasizes their need for special training in bilingual and intercultural education (Skourtou et al., 2004; Vratsalis and Skourtou, 2000).

2. The study

The present study is part of a two-year ethnographic research investigating, on the one hand, the views and language practices of a sample of 20 Albanian minority preschool and early primary school children and, on the other hand, the views and practices of their parents and teachers concerning the children's bilingualism. The overarching goal of the research is to examine the multiple ideologies through which bilingualism is perceived and experienced by the minority children both within their school and their home contexts. Selecting a qualitative interpretive approach to study the broader research questions about ideologies of language and the relationship between practices and beliefs about language (Heller, 2008), we used the ethnographic methods of participant observation in the children's classrooms and the school context, informal interviews in the field and formal semi-structured (individual and group) interviews with the children, their teachers and their parents. Thus we concentrated on multiple perspectives and sources of data collection to grasp the multidimensional and complex phenomenon of language ideologies mediating children's language behavior (González and Arnot-Hopffer, 2002).

In this article, the study examines the views and attitudes of four teachers, who are the teachers of the children of the research sample, towards linguistic diversity and bilingualism, attempting to reveal aspects of the underlying language
ideologies which affect, if not determine, their school practices towards minority children. Thus we attempt to shed light onto certain educational issues with political and ideological dimensions that greatly affect bilingual students’ sociolinguistic realities. To this end, we employed a qualitative research methodology, studying the views of two primary school and two kindergarten teachers concerning the following issues:

- the way they perceive the presence of Albanian immigrant background children in their classrooms,
- minority language maintenance and its use or non-use in the school context,
- the way the Greek school responds to the children’s bilingualism and to linguistic diversity

Investigating the teachers’ views and attitudes concerning diversity and bilingualism, which are part of their language ideologies concerning languages (use and learning) can help us understand how such issues are perceived and dealt with in everyday school practice and language teaching and can provide insights into the way teachers may explicitly or implicitly sustain and reproduce prevailing power relations and language hierarchies at school. These insights can lead us to a deeper understanding of the already documented need for Greek teachers’ training concerning issues of bilingualism and intercultural education (Skourtou et al., 2004; Vratsalis and Skourtou, 2000). A very important step towards enhancing their awareness, knowledge and education regarding such issues is to bring to the surface the underlying, language ideologies, which could be considered hegemonic since they are sustained as the natural, obvious and common sense way of making sense of the world (Haberland, 2009). Thus, they can be unconsciously and naturally promoted in the school context through consent and persuasion. Therefore, we believe that once we trace and study potential misconceptions and contradictions in the views expressed by educators they may be assisted to critically negotiate, challenge and deconstruct them.

2.1. The school context

The broader study has been conducted during the school years 2008–9, 2009–10 at a mainstream primary school and its nearby kindergarten school in a rural and tourist region, outside the city of Volos, in central Greece. The two schools were selected based on two criteria: (a) their high percentage of students of Albanian background, who had either immigrated at an early age or were born in Greece and account for almost half of the total student population, (b) the close relationship of the researcher with the schools, the teachers and students since she had worked there as a foreign language teacher which ensured a relation of trust with the research sample and provided easy access to the school communities, thus constituting a common ground with the field, a very important premise for ethnographic research in general (Van Lier, 1988).

2.2. The teachers’ profile

The two primary school teachers taught at third and second grades and had 10 and 11 years of teaching experience respectively while the kindergarten teacher had 5 and the kindergarten head teacher 10 years of experience. The head teacher of the kindergarten school taught only in the morning class (from 8.15 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.) and the other teacher in the afternoon class which is called all-day school (from 12.30 p.m. to 15.45 p.m.). They all reported speaking English as a foreign language to a certain degree. None of them mentioned having any training in intercultural education or second language teaching and only one, the third grade teacher, reported having attended a course related to bilingualism as a university student. Nevertheless, they all had teaching experience with immigrant students, mostly in the schools they currently work, where there is a high percentage of Albanian background children. (see Table 1)

2.3. Method of data collection and analysis

In the context of the ethnographic approach which we followed in the broader study, the teachers took part in in-depth, semi-structured interviews based on a series of question-topics addressing the issues under study during the school year 2008–2009. The data discussed in the present article also include informal interviews in the field. In the second year of the study, follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with the same teachers in order to examine ideological issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years of teaching experience</th>
<th>Second -foreign language</th>
<th>Training in intercultural-second language teaching</th>
<th>Teaching experience with immigrant students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Primary school teacher</td>
<td>3rd grade</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>English as a FL</td>
<td>University course on bilingualism</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Primary school teacher</td>
<td>2nd grade</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>English as a FL</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(afternoon classes)</td>
<td>KINDERGARTEN</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>English as a FL</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Kindergarten teacher</td>
<td>KINDERGARTEN</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>English as a FL</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Kindergarten Head Teacher</td>
<td>KINDERGARTEN</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>English as a FL</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(morning classes)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
in depth. Core questions used as a guide in the interviews are presented in Appendix A. The intention of all the interviews was to give teachers the opportunity to express their views freely and elaborate on them by discussing issues of language diversity within the specific contexts of their classrooms, focusing on their own students and experiences with them in the everyday school practice. The interviews were conducted in person, were audio-recorded with their permission, transcribed and translated into English, following a word-for-word manner of translation. Notes were made after the interviews and during the transcription and were added to field notes which were taken during the course of the study, in order to fully grasp the way bilingualism is perceived and dealt with at school and to identify the thematic categories under investigation.

In the course of the data collection of the broader study, the researcher carried out participant observation in the children's classrooms and the school context, focusing on their language behavior and practices and kept detailed field notes on events and interactions among children and teachers concerning language practices that could reflect language ideologies. The data also include informal conversations and formal semi-structured interviews with the children and their teachers to elicit conversation about language use and ideologies. An interpretative approach was used in order to study carefully the teachers' views in relation to the research questions and allow themes to emerge from their discourse (Guardano, 2002), thus developing a close understanding of their perceptions and the way they operate and function in their everyday teaching practices and experiences with the immigrant students and their bilingualism. The interview data was analysed by employing an inductive analysis, in which the themes and categories emerge from the data rather than being predefined (Palis, 1997), coding and categorizing the data in order to develop categories and identify emergent themes (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). Within this interpretive framework, we examined emergent categories concerning language ideologies and practices from the data by employing an inductive analysis (Becker, 1998; Erickson, 1986) and a cyclical procedure in order to test, confirm or refine categories in the progress of the collection and analysis stages.

The small number of the teachers does not permit us to make claims for representational generalization or transferability (Lewis and Ritchie, 2003), beyond the specific data context, but the findings of the present study can hopefully generate some hypotheses about teacher ideologies and their relation to teacher training which can be further and wider examined. The credibility of this small-scale study is built upon the researcher's long-term participation and engagement with the field and the participants (bilingual children, teachers and immigrant parents) over a two-year period (Davis, 1995; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) through participant observation, the use of field notes, informal and formal interviews, which enhance the emic perspective in the interpretation of the data and allow the gathering of “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973). Moreover, we believe that the combination of our research methods (observation and individual/group interviews) and the use of multiple perspectives and sources of data collection in the broader study enhance the credibility of the present data. The analysis of the views of the primary and kindergarten school teachers below attempts to present their perspectives about bilingualism, the use of the minority language at school and the way the school responds to diversity on a continuum from an awareness of the value of bilingualism and diversity towards disregard and devaluation of the children's bilingualism. Due to lack of space in the present article, we regret not providing the interview extracts in the Greek language as well. The analysis that follows is based on the content of the translated versions of the texts.

3. Findings

3.1. Third grade teacher: “Πώνει το επίπεδο των γικών μας παιδιών” “The level of our children drops”

3.1.1. Ideology and school context: perception of linguistic diversity

The 3rd grade teacher perceives diversity in her classroom as a problem which creates difficulties to the progress of the rest of the class. Quoting and translating her words:

“I believe that simply the level of our children drops”

“Πιστεύω ότι απλά πώνει το επίπεδο των γικών μας παιδιών” (underlining is used for our emphasis)

The distinction between them – the other children – and us -“our” children- (των γικών μας παιδιών) is revealed from her view. The presence of immigrant children in the classroom delays the progress of native Greek speaking children because the teacher needs to devote more time to them individually. Drawing from her first interview, she elaborates on her view in the extract below:

Extract 1: “Perhaps, reception schools should be made exclusively for the children, to enter, to prepare and then to integrate into Greek schools but a child, who doesn't know, entering a classroom, lowers the level right away either the teacher won't concern himself so much as he should because it is de facto that he can't or he will concern himself and the level will drop, okay some balances can be kept but it is very difficult”

The presence of immigrant children in the classroom delays the progress of native Greek speaking children because they 'don't know', implying that if they don't know the Greek language they don't know at all, they have a deficit and lack the cognitive and linguistic capacity to perform academically in the Greek school. Consequently the teacher needs to devote more time to them individually as a remedial or compensatory treatment, which cannot be done without negatively affecting the progress of the class. Thus we can deduce that, for the third grade teacher, Greek schools can only include and integrate children who know the school language after having received "exclusive" language instruction in "exclusive"
reception schools. Misconceptions concerning the children's bilingualism regularly emerge in our informal interviews throughout the study, as revealed from the teacher's constant use of words such as gaps, language problems, unknown words, they don't have vocabulary to describe their difficulties. In the extract below, which comes from an informal interview, she uses the term 'bilingualism' explicitly, to account for an immigrant student's learning difficulties, which is seldom used by the teachers of the school in their everyday discourse to refer to the language behavior of Albanian minority children.

**Extract 2:** Edona has problems with the vocabulary, she doesn't know the meaning of many words, as all these children do, because of her bilingualism, she has many unknown words, gaps (field notes translated from Greek)

In extract 2 the third grade teacher reveals a limited perception of diversity and bilingualism in the school context which reflects a monolingual ideological orientation, according to which the minority language or the bilingualism of immigrant children are perceived as an obstacle, as language deficiency and lack of knowledge that causes learning difficulties and places an extra burden on teachers. Her limited perception of bilingualism on the one hand and her confusion concerning its concept on the other are revealed from her discourse relating to the minority children's difficulties as shown in extract 3 below, which comes from the follow-up interview. It additionally reflects her insistence on the correct use and learning of the school language norm and the "nice expressions", the appropriate written form of the Greek language which they are required to know and produce.

**Extract 3:** Q: "So mostly, where do you locate their difficulties?

A: The vocabulary and this has problems in the production of writing skills they don't have nice expressions to write a small passage, they will write simple and the same and same they use when speaking.

Q: What do you attribute it to?

A: To the fact that they continue to speak Albanian at home and they do right speaking it of course because it is their mother tongue and that they don't come to contact with people who have a good command of the Greek language except at school and with the teacher and moreover... when they speak Albanian at home and do not master the Greek language and only at school therefore their vocabulary is poor, the problem is there and only there."

Her discourse concerning the presence and school performance of minority children reveals misconceptions concerning bilingualism and learning, a limited perception of bilingualism as a source of problems, based on a monolingual view and a language deficit assumption (Lee and Anderson, 2009) including family literacy at home, as well as an adherence to the notion of the correct use of the school language norm. Moreover, her rhetoric brings forward contradictions concerning bilingualism, which ideologically is perceived as a right (they do right speaking it of course because it is their mother tongue) but in terms of teaching and learning it is constructed as a deficit and an obstacle to the mastering of the ideal native speaker-like language behavior (do not master the Greek language, their vocabulary is poor). Addressing the explicit question concerning the way she deals with diversity in the classroom, she expresses the view that the presence of immigrant children is an advantage because it allows for cultural exchange in the classroom with the proviso that, however, they attend the Greek school from the early years, know the language and can communicate implying that diversity on a theoretical level is positive but concerning everyday teaching practice it can only be accepted and utilised through monolingualism. In other words, she expresses practices that deal with interculturality through and within monolingualism.

3.1.2. The (non)—use of the minority language in the school context

Concerning the use of the minority language in the school context, the same teacher reveals that she has never heard them speak Albanian in or outside the classroom, not even among themselves. She attributes the children's non-use of the minority language in the school context to their feelings of embarrassment which are raised by their parents and refers to the social prejudice which may be expressed by some monolingual, Greek-speaking families through their children. The extract below comes from her first interview:

**Extract 4:** "I believe they are embarrassed so it would be good if they were taught the Albanian language too, it would be considered as a subject and if they spoke outside it would be something allowed now they consider it forbidden although we don't give them that"

Q: How is this message conveyed?

A: I believe it is transferred by their parents..."

The use of labels such as allowed and forbidden imply language ideologies concerning language use at school, which she perceives to be embraced and enacted by the children through their parents' socialization, disregarding the fact that messages may be implicitly or explicitly transferred by dominating school language policies and ideologies (we don't give them that). Thus she expresses the view that social distinctions or language hierarchies do not enter the classroom or count at school. Although she reveals awareness and sensitivity concerning social attitudes towards immigrant groups and

---

3 Pseudonyms are used for all children of the sample.
languages, she shows lack of awareness of the powerful messages conveyed by mainstream school practices and the underlying language ideologies. The non-use of the minority language among the bilingual children in the classroom is an a priori condition perceived as obvious and normal since they attend the Greek school. Concerning the value of the children’s languages, she has favourable attitudes towards minority language maintenance and instruction recognizing its positive cultural and psychological effect. Moreover, she believes that the integration of the minority language into the school curriculum would be positive not, however, in order to facilitate their academic and language development but in terms of their social and psychological well-being. It would legitimize and value their language and it would give it the status of a language which is formally taught at school.

3.1.3. The ideology of ‘equality for all’ in the Greek school

The third grade teacher believes that teachers do not, implicitly or explicitly, convey messages concerning the value and the legitimacy of the students’ minority languages. She perceives school as a site of equality from the teachers’ side, where all teachers care about the children’s inclusion and treat all students in a similar manner. Drawing from the follow-up interview with the teacher:

Extract 5: Q: “But the question is why do they consider it (the minority language) as something forbidden?
A: I believe that this comes from their home not from us, the teachers, I haven’t seen anything that is discriminating.
Q: So are there no distinctions in the Greek school?
A: No, no, from the teachers I believe not, and if there are, they are the exception.
Q: Do you believe that children feel equal in the classroom?
A: From the treatment on the part of the teacher yes, but they (the students) themselves believe that they are weak and fall more behind at school lessons.”

In the above extract, from the use of labels such as weak and more behind, it could be inferred that according to the third grade teacher bilingual children are associated with perceptions of being low-achieving or academically “at risk”. She doesn’t consider however the fact that these positions, “these unmarked ways of being” may not be fixed and simply adopted by the children but are “relational and value-laden constructs” imposed on them and reflect negative stereotypes and low expectations about their academic performance, which can lead to their disempowerment at school (Lee and Anderson, 2009). On the other hand, according to the teacher, due to the teacher’s same-like treatment towards all children, bilingual students are required to believe that everyone has equal power in the classroom ignoring the fact that the linguistic capital they possess gives or denies them access to the learning community and therefore to academic success. If, however, sameness is emphasized in order for everyone to be the same and differences to be downplayed, the existing power relations and social structure may be just masked, glossing over the reproduction of inequity (Fitts, 2006). Children, on the other hand, according to our research data, quickly seem to become aware of how power relations work at school and internalize messages about the value and legitimacy of the minority language, constraining its use in the school context (Gkaintzitzi, unpublished results).

In extract 6, which comes from a follow-up interview, the third grade teacher responds to an explicit question concerning the teachers’ language practices and attitudes towards minority language use:

Extract 6: Q: “Could children perhaps be unconsciously receiving messages from teachers concerning the Albanian language? Implicit or explicit e.g. that they mustn’t speak it at school?”
A: “No, no, I haven’t seen such thing, no, no that children, you have difficulties because you are from another country and you speak another language at home and you face difficulties and you will face more, we tell them such things because of bilingualism which has these problems... but not why don’t you speak Albanian? No, neither speak Albanian nor don’t speak it, such issue is not raised, it doesn’t concern us…”

From the above extract, it may be inferred that power relations among languages at school are perceived by the third grade teacher as natural, as ‘they way things are’ and as beyond the control or the responsibility of the teacher since she seems to show lack of awareness of the fact that language ideologies and messages concerning the minority language (and its use) are inevitably conveyed by teachers through the way they are – “or are not concerned” with it and through their implicit, deficit-driven discourse (Ruiz, 1984) which charges their bilingualism and immigrant family background (you have difficulties because you are from another country and speak another language at home) and defines students according to their ability to speak Greek. The third grade teacher could be viewed as moving towards awareness of the importance of minority language maintenance and instruction for the children’s personal benefits. Nevertheless, she has not yet reached the stage of viewing it in terms of additive bilingualism (Lambert, 1974; Cummins, 1979) which leads to their better academic and language development. She also demonstrates some intercultural sensitivity and awareness of the conflicts that the children undergo concerning the value of their language without however going one step further to consider the role of school language policies and their political dimensions, since she envisages the Greek school as site of social equality achieved by teachers.
3.2. Second grade teacher: “Είναι πιτ υποψήφιοι οι γονείς από ελληνικά και κατά πάσο προσπαθούν και αυτοί να γίνουν Έλληνες, σε εισαγωγικά”

“It all comes down to how well parents know Greek and how hard they also try to become Greek themselves—Greek used metaphorically”

3.2.1. Ideology and school context: perception of linguistic diversity

The second grade teacher claims that the presence of immigrant children creates problems because of the difficulties in communication in the early years of primary school and these difficulties are attributed to the language practices at home. She believes that it all depends on the immigrant parents’ proficiency in the second language, their language choice and use at home and their desire to assimilate linguistically and culturally. She also reveals a limited perception of bilingualism which derives from a monolingual view of language functioning (Helot and Young, 2002) attributing the children’s school difficulties to the use of the minority language at home and the perceived lack of support from their parents. Furthermore, she interprets Albanian speaking parents’ home practices as a denial or failure to assimilate “appropriately” to the Greek society. In extract 7 below which comes from her first interview, she expresses her views, referring to two Albanian background students, Edona and Drita:

Extract 7: “Edona speaks Greek at home, her mother tries to make her be exactly the same as the other children, not to differ in anything, to take part in all events, they do not want to differ, they try to assimilate, they don’t want to distinguish themselves, simply it is more difficult for some (children) because at home too it all comes down to how well parents know Greek and how hard they also try to become Greek themselves. Greek used metaphorically, Edona’s mother comes every day, she is like Greek; she tries to practice her Greek (language), Drita’s mother can’t be trying, she came in the beginning and looked at me and she says: I don’t understand … She stays at home, she doesn’t work outdoors … she doesn’t try to learn Greek not even through Drita.”

This assimilationist view revealed through the use of the expressions to be exactly the same, to assimilate, to become Greek emphasizes homogeneity and reflects Greek-only language policies at school and at home. Furthermore, the second grade teacher implies that immigrants are obliged to assimilate to the Greek society (behave appropriately “like Greek mothers”), acquire and practice the Greek language. Issues of identity (Greek used metaphorically, she is like Greek) come to the surface from the above extract which will be discussed in the next section more explicitly. Contradictions emerge from her views regarding bilingualism too, since although she acknowledges the importance of the minority language “for them”, for her students, their families and communities, as their own heritage resource and individual responsibility, she explicitly states that continuing to speak the minority language at home creates problems “for us”, the teachers and the children’s learning process. Thus, she expresses the language – as a problem – orientation (Ruiz, 1984), revealing misconceptions about bilingualism, relating to a common myth surrounding bilingualism (Shin, 2003) i.e. it delays the development of the school language, hinders academic performance and burdens the teacher. This is shown in the following extract (8) from the teacher’s follow-up interview:

Extract 8: Q: “Is it important to speak their first language?”
A: “Okay certainly although for us it creates difficulties in practice if they speak Albanian at home but for them yes they have to continue to speak it the Greeks in America, in Germany they want to maintain the contact.”

3.2.2. The (non)—use of the first language in the school context

The same teacher also states that the minority children do not use the minority language in the school context and explains that the children themselves choose not to do so, without receiving any explicit messages or guidelines by the teachers. Quoting her response concerning minority language use from her first interview in extract 9:

Extract 9: “I think they are not embarrassed now simply it doesn’t concern them so much … here they believe they must speak Greek and adapt to the other children, behave like the other children and they bring out the Greek element.”

Q: How are these messages transferred?
A: “They come to a school they hear everyone else speak Greek, all instructions are in Greek, they understand that here we speak this (language) and they must have identified the language with specific people i.e. at home, the mother, the grandmother speak Albanian, there I can speak.”

The use of words like must or the Greek element imply language ideologies which underlie language practices and reinforce assimilation since here – at this school – we all speak one language which also identifies us as Greeks and brings out our “Greekness”. She stresses the importance of learning and speaking only Greek for minority children in order to “adapt to the other children” and “behave like the other children”, in order to be or behave as Greek, to acquire and express the expected and legitimate social identity which lies on the “Greek element” so as to be accepted. However, contradictions emerge from her discourse concerning the way she conceives identity and the ownership of the Greek identity and language since as she stated in extract 7 concerning immigrant parents, speaking Greek and assimilating into the Greek society can index a Greek element/identity only however in a metaphorical sense, used in quotation marks, implying that the Greek identity can never
be claimed or really owned by immigrants. The paradox underlying this ideology is that immigrants are expected to assimilate into the Greek language and society at all costs, which will confer them “legitimacy” and validity as speakers and members of society but they are excluded from the ownership of the “authentic” Greek national identity since their identity is marked by their immigrant status. Her discourse reflects ideologies defining the “authentic native speaker” and the “authentic” Greek identity and reproduces the construct of the notion of “Greekness” that excludes minority groups, as described by Giryö (1991). This idealized notion of language and identity is, according to Anderson (1991) one dimension of the artificial construction of a nation as an “imagined community”, which also relates to the language education of bilingual immigrant students, who are taught the majority language as the only language that counts (Leung et al., 1997).

3.2.3. The ideology of ‘one language for all’ in the Greek school

At a school in which almost half of the student population is children of Albanian immigrant background, neither teacher has ever heard them speak the minority language, as reflected from extract 10:

**Extract 10:** “They perceive the Greek language as de facto … that at school we mustn’t speak it (the Albanian language) so much, here we speak Greek, it doesn’t interest them to use it, only in their environment, at home or in Albania, and here outside at school never have I noticed them going to a corner and speak with other Albanians. The Albanian language was heard at school, in the last 4-5 years we have been here, when Agon came who was of an older age and needed somebody to translate … and at that time was Albanian heard at school but later on too the Albanians never spoke Albanian apart from the times we asked them to translate.”

The above quote shows that the teacher perceives these acculturation strategies and behavior as normal, as the only possible and appropriate way to be able to perform successfully in the Greek school and community. She doesn’t consider that the children’s linguistic behavior may be enforced by the existing school policies and practices and believes that the immigrant children respond to this reality without experiencing any conflicts or pressures. They are just not interested, they are just not “concerned”—with the other language and identity. She doesn’t consider that it may not be a choice for them but rather the only option to become a full member and succeed at school. Therefore, she implies the view that the minority language is important within the immigrant families, in the home environment or in the home country but outside the home and the community it loses its value, it isn’t accepted, it isn’t considered valid or legitimate. The extract below coming from her second formal interview reveals her response to the explicit question about the school’s and the teachers’ role in reproducing language ideologies concerning the value of the minority language:

**Extract 11:** “Surely the school doesn’t encourage children from Albania to speak the Albanian language, for sure, this is the only certain thing, because it may propagate in favour of the Greek language, only in the sense that in the classroom you speak Greek and you tell them ‘try’ ‘say it’ and essentially it is de facto that you push them to the Greek language.

Q: At the cost of the Albanian language?
A: Disregarding what they are going to do with Albanian, you don’t tell them not to learn Albanian but you tell them that in any case they have to learn Greek correctly.

Q: Do you think that the school has a language policy?
A: I don’t think so, I don’t pass it like that, I try to teach them Greek as well as possible and in the classroom to speak Greek because since they live in Greece it is the language they will need and I believe that if their parents want them to know Albanian well, they must do it by themselves, my role is to teach them to speak Greek well…”

She articulates school language policies and ideologies which reflect the urgency to learn Greek correctly and reinforce monolingualism and assimilation, without however being fully conscious of their political dimensions concerning bilingualism and diversity. She doesn’t perceive it a “policy” but rather as a de facto reality definitely and naturally occurring, which means teaching the Greek language at the expense of the minority language, as the only language that counts at school and in society, a responsibility that defines her role and her responsibility decisively as a Greek teacher. In terms of the proposed continuum regarding the teachers’ perspectives, the second grade teacher advocates more assimilationist views insisting on the dominant view that more time and greater exposure leads to faster and better second language acquisition. She doesn’t show awareness of the pressures immigrant children and their families experience to respond to the school context which is oriented towards monolingualism and rather reproduces the Greek—only language ideology. She does demonstrate awareness of a certain degree of the way power relations among languages function at school, viewing them however as a natural, essential, de facto and normal condition, which responds to the ‘social reality’, manifesting thus its commonsense and unquestioned nature.

3.3. The kindergarten teacher (all-day classes): “Τα παρασκήνια είναι εντυπωσιακά στην ελληνική ζωή και πάντα πραξικότατα κατανέμονται,” προκειμένου οι παιδικές κατανέμονται, εξαιτίας της ελληνικά κλίματος.

“Most of them are integrated into the Greek culture e.g. at Easter we made candles, everyone did, they are inside the Greek way.”

3.3.1. Ideology and school context: perception of linguistic diversity

The kindergarten teacher believes that the presence of Albanian background children creates problems when they can’t speak the second language concerning their adjustment to the school environment and their communication with the
teacher. She perceives these children as a burden, as an additional difficulty for the teacher. A contradiction arises from her views as well, as she goes on to say that most children actually learn the second language quite quickly since they spend a big part of their day at school. So, on the one hand, she emphasizes communication difficulties which both teachers and children face and, on the other hand, she points out that these children overcome communication problems quite quickly and easily develop basic communication language skills. This is the first teacher to admit that lack of training increases the difficulties teachers face in dealing with diversity in the classroom and reveals that intercultural education is not utilized at the level of preschool education. She herself has never made a single reference to the ‘other’ linguistic-cultural capital of these children although more than half of her students come from Albanian immigrant families, since she believes she does not need to do so. Quoting her own words from her first interview below:

Extract 12: “At kindergarten I don’t see that it (intercultural education) is done, we haven’t had a seminar about that too.

Q: Have you tried it with the preschool children?
A: Most of them are integrated into the Greek culture e.g. at Easter we made candles, everyone did, they are inside the Greek way.”

She perceives these children as fully assimilated into the Greek culture and treats them all the same, without having to make any reference to linguistic or cultural differences. An additional contradiction arises from her views: on the one hand, she advocates that she doesn’t need to employ intercultural practices since most children were born in Greece and, on the other hand, she refers to them as “Albanian children” in her discourse, not accepting ideologically their double, Albanian-Greek identity, drawing thus the distinction between them and us.

3.3.2. The (non)—use of minority language in the school context

The all-day kindergarten teacher expresses the view that Albanian minority children do not speak Albanian at school because they do not have a reason to do so; there is no need to use the minority language since they attend a Greek kindergarten thus approaching the cause in a restricted, functional manner, without taking into account the emotional or symbolic dimensions of language (Cummins, 2001), as shown in extract 13 from the follow up interview.

Extract 13: “Because at school we, the teachers, spoke Greek in order to understand therefore I don’t think they had a reason to speak Albanian since they were at school they talked about Greek (alphabet) letters, the stories were all in Greek, so it was for them…”

Contradictions and a degree of confusion concerning the concept of bilingualism and its relation to school learning are revealed from her views as well. Bilingualism is perceived as an asset for the bilingual children themselves. However, concerning its potential contribution to the process of learning the kindergarten teacher responds in the following way:

Extract 14: Q: Can bilingualism facilitate learning?
A: “E.g. an Albanian child that has learnt the Greek language? That facilitates the child to learn at school.”

Children of Albanian immigrant background are perceived as bilingual only if they have learnt to use the second language before attending kindergarten, and only in such a case may bilingualism be considered to facilitate learning. The children’s bilingualism remains invisible in everyday teaching practice and the parallel use of the minority language in the classroom is perceived as an obstacle to the school’s unity and coherence which is achieved through monolinguism. In the extract below, which comes from her first interview, she reveals her view concerning the use of translation, which implies specific school language policies and ideologies.

Extract 15: Q: Do you find translation wrong?
A: “Yes, because the codes of communication will break down we will all speak in Albanian and then what will be the meaning of the Greek school?”

Her response demonstrates the lack of relevant knowledge concerning the interdependence of languages (Cummins, 2001) on the part of the educator. Besides that, there are ideological dimensions that arise, since the use of the ‘other’ language, even through the process of translation, is considered as a threat for the future of the Greek school. The parallel use of languages is perceived to ‘lead to the breaking down of communication’ and it is seen to result in a situation where ‘we will all speak in Albanian’. Therefore, the Greek school’s identity will be threatened as the meaning of the Greek school will be lost (“what will be the meaning of the Greek school?”). The political dimensions of bilingualism come to the fore: Language policies which are promoted in the Greek school aim at the maintenance of social coherence, at the guarding of an ‘imagined’, greatly desired, linguistic and cultural homogeneity. On the other hand, the Greek school promotes and secures equality, according to the kindergarten teacher as well, revealing further contradictions and discontinuities in her discourse drawn from her follow-up interview.
Extract 16: "As an educator I try to be equal and fair towards all children concerning the knowledge I want to transfer to them, concerning their behaviour I don’t distinguish them because of nationality.

Q: The fact that in the Greek school their other language has no use or value, can this on its own be received as a form of discrimination?
A: For the small children that are very young I don’t think they perceive it, those who were born in Greece or came here when they were infants and started school here, I don’t think so, because it is the language which has usability now... Q: Do you think that teachers transfer messages to children, through their attitudes towards them or their language, concerning the value of languages?
A: We also do this of course, unintentionally too, we also consider our language as being more, how do you say it, of first importance in relation to the Albanian language.
Q: Can the children be receiving this?
A: They could be receiving it.
Q: Have you seen it from your experience?
A: No I don’t think so on the contrary the Greek school has embraced the Albanian speaking children I don’t think they feel marginalised."

3.4. The kindergarten head teacher (morning classes): “Είναι πολύ καλό παιδί αλλά δεν μιλάει.” “She is a very good child but she doesn’t speak.”

3.4.1. The (non)—use of minority language in the school context

The kindergarten head teacher, who is also the teacher of the morning classes, addressing the issue of diversity at school, reveals explicit language policies and underlying ideologies, which reinforce the minority children's intense assimilation to the school language. The minority preschool children who speak and continue to use the Albanian language among themselves at the first year of preschool education are her students, who mostly attend the morning classes only and do not stay at all-day school, since their mothers do not work which means that they speak mostly Albanian at home. It is the language these children have been socialized in and communicate naturally in their lives, which they also bring to kindergarten. The way the kindergarten head teacher perceives and responds to the use of the minority language in the school context surfaces from the extract below which comes from her first interview:

Extract 17: “They talk in small groups spontaneously and unconsciously even though they have reduced it considerably from the beginning of the school year... the children themselves control it, especially girls, they have overcome it so far.”

The above quote reveals that the head teacher considers the children's bilingualism as problematic, as an obstacle which they have overcome and she proceeds in the following way:

Q: What has contributed to that?
A: “To reducing the Albanian language use? First that we insist on the fact that we all have to speak Greek at school and besides that, by learning Greek at school they become one with this environment.”

The kindergarten head teacher advocates assimilationist – Greek only – language policies which are promoted in the kindergarten and have in the course of a school year achieved their goal: the children’s linguistic assimilation. For the head teacher, the classroom works as a whole which is homogeneous and monolingual and the use of the minority language disrupts its homogeneity. Therefore, the minority children respond to the school language policies and struggle to become ‘unified’, tied with the others and valid members of the school community by using its language. She perceives language diversity as an obstacle to the social organization of the classroom, to the unity and coherence of its whole. In the follow-up interview, the second year of the study, she expresses her explicit justification, reflecting on the language policies she follows, in terms of classroom unity and her role as a Greek language teacher:

Extract 18: “Simply, it was not good for the group of the class and it is supposed that my role was to help them, to prepare them for primary school, how would I prepare them for primary school if I didn’t force them to learn Greek...”

3.4.2. The ‘invisibility’ of children's bilingualism

In terms of teaching practice the children’s bilingualism is not only perceived as an obstacle to second language learning and academic progress but also as a deficit that hinders the children’s full inclusion to the school community, threatening the school’s unity and coherence as well. The invisibility of the children’s bilingualism and the devaluation of the minority language are further revealed in the kindergarten head teacher’s statement—observation about a girl of Albanian background who had immigrated the previous year. In an informal interview, she comments with surprise:

“She is a very good child but she doesn’t speak.” (field notes)
From the above comment, we could infer that if the children do not speak the school language, they do not speak at all, they are perceived as 'voiceless'. On the contrary, this child has a language which she can speak but the teacher doesn't 'see', recognize or accept. Thus the child doesn't use it and is restricted to silence, she is positioned as 'voiceless', since she lacks the appropriate linguistic capital, which would give her a recognized identity 'as a student and 'a voice' in the school community. The kindergarten head teacher explicitly rejects the position and value of the minority language in the school context expressing confusion and contradictions in her views too as revealed in the extract below from her first interview:

Extract 19: “Not only does it (knowing Greek) facilitate learning but, in my opinion, it is obligatory because otherwise they won't be able to follow the next stages of education, what we say in kindergarten and we are fixed to an extent is” speak Greek on a regular basis in order to help children learn, to unlock their tongue”

Q: Does the other language create difficulties?
A: “No”

Although the head teacher claims that the use of other languages does not create problems on a theoretical level, she expresses the view that it is the Greek language which will "unlock" the children's ability to communicate. She, thus, advocates the gradual subtraction of the first language and the children's assimilation to the second language as an obligatory and urgent precondition for the children's success and full-inclusion at school. Drawing from her follow-up interview, she reveals her perception of the parallel use of the minority language and of children's bilingualism as an obstacle in her everyday teaching practice, expressing further contradictions.

Extract 20: Q: Did you see that it (Albanian language) was a problem to learning Greek and this is why you told them so?
A: No It was a problem for me, because it became a habit to them and easy to use.

The two kindergarten teachers express the most negative attitudes towards diversity, viewing it mostly as a threat to the school's unity and social function, as a violation to the school's uniformity and group identity and an obstacle to the minority children's inclusion, membership and preparation for primary education. Thus they advocate and implement intense assimilationist policies, which contribute to the subtraction of the children's bilingualism (Lambert, 1974). It becomes even more concerning if one considers that such language ideologies and policies are promoted at the level of preschool education, at such an early stage in which minority children still use the home language, since they can have a negative effect on their bilingualism, thus affecting the children's social, emotional, cognitive and educational development (Cummins, 2001; Baker, 1996; Wong Fillmore, 1991). Throughout the one or two years of kindergarten education children receive messages concerning the value of languages and are forced from an early stage to constrain its use, thus responding to existing power relations in education so as to perform successfully in primary school.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, although the teachers seem to acknowledge the value of bilingualism in rhetoric, they hold immigrant parents responsible for the children's bilingual development and they do not seem to be at all aware of its role in the children's language and academic development. All four educators have expressed, to different degrees, assimilationist views which evolve around the 'one language for all — equality for all' ideology, leading inevitably to the subtraction of bilingualism and the assimilation of their students. Confusion, ambivalence and ambiguity are revealed from contradictions that emerge in their discourse concerning their desire to encourage the full-inclusion and academic progress of immigrant children and the assimilative agenda that underlies their practices. A discrepancy also arises between the 'liberal' positions they advocate concerning diversity on a theoretical level and its categorization as problematic, burdensome, 'invisible' or 'non-existent' in terms of their everyday classroom reality. In congruence with other research data, the Greek teachers promote the school ideology of 'equality for all', which reinforces sameness as a prerequisite for success (Jay, 2003), thus viewing the subtraction of bilingualism as a natural outcome of schooling and showing lack of awareness as to the reproduction of power relations in the school context (Garza and Crawford, 2005).

Drawing from our findings and taking into account the small number of the teacher sample, we argue that teacher training and further education concerning bilingualism and intercultural teaching/learning could include the clarification of the concepts of bilingualism and linguistic diversity, the cognitive theories of bilingualism and the curriculum (Cummins, 2001; Baker, 2000, 1996, 1995) and the explicit description of the ways bilingualism (of minority children) mediates and facilitates (language) learning both in theory and in practice. Initially, the confusions emerging from teachers' discourse, which mirror "muddled myths surrounding bilingualism" (Baker, 1995: 41) need to be exposed, studied and dispelled since such misconceptions not only hinder minority children's academic performance and language development but also contribute to the disempowerment of their identities and the reproduction of social inequalities and coercive power relations in the classroom (Cummins, 2000). To this end, we propose the encouragement of a constant communication among academics, educators, parents and children bringing also forward the (competing) ideological issues involved, as attempted by the periodical "Polydromo" (Tsokalidou, 2009).
We insist on the active and powerful role of teachers in shaping school contexts and language policies since as Ricento and Hornberger (1996) have pointed out “change is most likely to come from the bottom-up than from the top-down” and we call for their systematic training and professional development to help them function as active agents in minority children education. It could build on teachers’ consciousness-raising, in order to make them more aware of their political and social role as educators, of the way power relations function and are exercised in the classroom and to expose the – often subtle and implicit – ways existing school policies may reproduce social inequalities. Ideologies are never static or stable since as Woolard (1998:21) states “some ideologies may continue to be held by people and some may be discarded on both societal and individual levels”. Recognizing thus the agentic role of teachers in constructing and deconstructing ideologies, language ideologies could be incorporated in teachers’ educational development, by initially exposing them, showing the contradictions and discontinuities in their discourse and openly challenging them in order to help them turn to a more pluralistic ideology regarding languages which recognizes and affirms diversity (Nieto, 1991). It is important to develop programmes that educate teachers to linguistic and cultural variety and the ways it can be exposed and utilized by starting from making them more conscious of they way they themselves perceive it politically and ideologically and of the way the perceive their role as educators regarding language teaching and minority children. Teachers need to be motivated to openly renegotiate the ideology of ‘one language for all’-equality for all’ at school and consciously deconstruct it, to realize its subtle hegemonic pressures, which reinforce linguistic assimilation and promote homogeneity as a prerequisite for success and develop the knowledge, skills and set of beliefs to act, challenge and resist power relations and the ideologies that sustain them.

Appendix A

A.1. Core questions used in teacher interviews

- Έχεις άλλες σχέσεις με τα παιδιά από την εβραϊκή κοινότητα; Πώς το βλέπεις αυτό;
- Τι επετρέπει στην τάξη σου πως τον αντιμετωπίζεις;
- Πώς καταλαβαίνεις τον αρμόδιο της για την ελληνική γλώσσα; Υπάρχουν μελετήματα και πλεονεκτήματα;
- Η ελληνική γλώσσα μπορεί να θεωρηθεί ένα πρόβλημα στην μάθηση στο σχολείο και η εφαρμοστικότητά της;
- Τι γνωμική έκπληξη για την ισχυρή γλώσσα των παιδιών; Είναι σημαντική;
- Τι γνωμική έκπληξη για την αρμόδιο της για την ελληνική γλώσσα; Υπάρχουν μελετήματα και πλεονεκτήματα;
- Τι γνωμική έκπληξη για την ισχυρή γλώσσα των παιδιών; Είναι σημαντική;
- Το παιδί αποδέχεται την ελληνική γλώσσα στην τάξη;
- Τι σχέδια έχεις για να βοηθήσουν τα παιδιά στο σχολείο;
- Τι συνοπτικά έχεις αυτό τα παιδιά των αλβανικών μεταναστών; Πώς τα αντιμετωπίζεις;
- Τι σχέδια έχεις για να βοηθήσουν τα παιδιά των αλβανικών μεταναστών; Πώς τα αντιμετωπίζεις;
- Τι πράζει για να κάνεις την ελληνική γλώσσα και τα εθνικά κοινά να συνάντησαν αυτά τα παιδιά;
- Πώς βλέπεις το ρόλο σου από την κοινότητα των αλβανικών μεταναστών;

A.2. Translation in English

- Has the number of children from other countries attending the Greek school increased? What do you think of that?
- How do you deal with diversity in your classroom?
- How do you understand the concept of bilingualism? Are there advantages or disadvantages?
- Can bilingualism facilitate school learning or does it create difficulties?
- What do you think of the children’s other language? Is it important?
- What language do the children of Albanian background of your class speak at home? What do you think of that? What advice do you give their parents in order to help the children with school learning?
- What are the difficulties that these children face at school? What do you attribute them to?
- Do these children speak Albanian in class or at school? How do you account for that? How do you deal with that?
- Some children say that they are embarrassed to speak Albanian at school or that they have forgotten it. What do you think of that?
- Do you think that children receive messages concerning languages (Greek and Albanian) and their value at school?
- Do you think that all children are equal at the Greek school? In what way?
- What should the Greek school and the teacher do concerning these children?
- How do you perceive your role in relation to these children?
References


Gkianitarzi, Anastasia (unpublished results).


