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Greek teachers' common misconceptions about bilingualism

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Greek teachers' common misconceptions about bilingualism[1]

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Abstract

Educators' attitudes, expectations and ideas about bilingualism play a central role regarding the stance their students will adopt towards home or first language (L1), and eventually in terms of the type of bilingualism their students will develop. On the other hand, the mapping of teachers' potential prejudices and misconceptions about bilingualism could contribute to the design of more efficient intercultural education programs, by pinpointing those areas needing particular attention for conceptual change. The relevant literature indicates several myths circulating about bilingualism. However, there are quite a few empirical studies exploring whether and to what extent teachers in general, as well in different socio-cultural settings, hold some or most of these misconceptions.

In the present study we draw upon the teaching experience gained from two intercultural education training programs for pre- and in-service teachers organized by the University of Thessaly (Volos, Greece). It is noteworthy that although teachers form a widely heterogeneous group (i.e. geographical background, years of teaching experience, working either in primary or in secondary schools, subjects taught), most of them seem to share the same misconceptions about bilingualism. This signals Greek society's immaturity in issues of bilingualism.

Keywords: L1 maintenance, bilingual students, language choice, attitudes towards bilingualism, Greek as L2

Περίληψη

Οι στάσεις, οι προσδοκίες και οι αντιλήψεις των εκπαιδευτικών για τη διγλωσσία διαδραματίζουν σημαντικό ρόλο αναφορικά με την αντιμετώπιση που θα υιοθετήσουν οι μαθητές/τριές τους προς τη μητρική ή πρώτη γλώσσα (Γ1), και τελικά θα επηρεάσουν τον τύπο της διγλωσσίας που οι μαθητές/τριές τους θα αναπτύξουν. Από την άλλη πλευρά, η χαρτογράφηση των προκαταλήψεων και παρανοήσεων που πιθανόν να έχουν οι εκπαιδευτικοί σχετικά με τη διγλωσσία μπορεί να συμβάλει στον σχεδιασμό αποτελεσματικότερων προγραμμάτων διαπολιτισμικής εκπαίδευσης, εντοπίζοντας τις γνωστικές περιοχές που χρειάζονται ιδιαίτερη προσοχή ώστε να επιτευχθεί εννοιολογική αλλαγή. Η σχετική βιβλιογραφία δείχνει ότι υπάρχουν αρκετοί μύθοι που κυκλοφορούν σχετικά με τη διγλωσσία. Ωστόσο, υπάρχουν πολύ λίγες εμπειρικές έρευνες που εξετάζουν αν, και σε ποιο βαθμό, οι εκπαιδευτικοί γενικά αλλά και σε διαφορετικά κοινωνικο-πολιτισμικά περιβάλλοντα κάνουν ορισμένες ή τις περισσότερες από αυτές τις παρανοήσεις.

Στην παρούσα εργασία αντλούμε στοιχεία από την εκπαιδευτική εμπειρία δύο επιμορφωτικών προγραμμάτων διαπολιτισμικής εκπαίδευσης για υπηρετούντες/ούσες και μη υπηρετούντες/ούσες εκπαιδευτικούς που οργανώθηκαν από το Πανεπιστήμιο Θεσσαλίας (Βόλος). Είναι αξιοσημείωτο πως παρόλο που οι εκπαιδευτικοί συγκροτούν μια πλήρως

[1] The first author would like to warmly thank Dr Anna Chronaki, associate professor at the University of Thessaly and scientific coordinator of the two intercultural education training programs upon which the present paper has been largely premised, for appointing her to teach the units of bilingualism and linguistic variation at school in the two aforementioned programs. She would like also to thank the teachers who participated in the two training programs and whose thoughts and ideas about bilingualism have fertilized this work.

ετερογενή ομάδα (δηλ. γεωγραφική προέλευση, διδακτική εμπειρία, διδασκαλία σε πρωτοβάθμια ή δευτεροβάθμια εκπαίδευση, ειδικότητα), οι περισσότεροι/ες από αυτούς/ές φαίνεται πως κάνουν τις ίδιες παρανοήσεις για τη διγλωσσία. Αυτό καταδεικνύει την ανωριμότητα της ελληνικής κοινωνίας σε θέματα διγλωσσίας.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: διατήρηση της Γ1, δίγλωσσοι/ες μαθητές/τριες, γλωσσική επιλογή, στάσεις προς τη διγλωσσία, η ελληνική ως Γ2

Introduction

One of the major concerns of interculturalism is the social integration of minority and immigrational ethnic groups through the maintenance of their particular cultural and linguistic capital rather than their assimilation by the dominant language and culture. In particular, the maintenance of the home language of students is seen as a necessary prerequisite for their school success, by enhancing their self-esteem, eliminating the prejudices of the whole class, and helping to the more successful learning of the majority language (e.g. Baker 2000, Cummins 2000). From this perspective, language education should aim at making students "additive" rather than "subtractive bilinguals" (Baker 1996). In the former case, the knowledge of the majority or second language (L2) is added to that of the home or first language (L1), enriching the students' existent linguistic capital. In the latter case, the knowledge of L2 replaces that of L1, leading to language death.

Although attitudes and perceptions about certain languages or linguistic phenomena constitute subjective judgments being usually in contrast to scientific evidence, they still affect the objective reality of those linguistic codes and phenomena (Ryan et al. 1992). In this sense, educators' attitudes, expectations and ideas about bilingualism play a central role regarding the stance their students will adopt towards L1, and eventually in terms of the type of bilingualism their students will develop. For instance, in a study with Spanish speaking Mexican background children in the United States, Ernst-Slavit (1997) concluded that the disapproval of their versions of Spanish vocabulary by the Castilian-speaking teacher contributed for them to develop a subtractive form of bilingualism. The exploration of teachers' thoughts about bilingualism is particularly important considering the Greek context, the education of which has been oriented towards monoglot, monoethnic orthodox Christian students, although immigrants (mainly from Albania) constitute over 10% of its total population at the moment (Michail 2004). Consequently, Greek language is practically taught as L1 for all students (Chatzidaki 2000). On the other hand, the relevant literature indicates several myths circulating about bilingualism, which also discourage L1 maintenance (e.g. Cummins 2000). A more practical implication from the mapping of teachers' potential prejudices and misconceptions about bilingualism would be the design of more efficient intercultural education programs, by helping to pinpoint those areas needing particular attention for conceptual change.

In the present study, we draw upon the teaching experience gained from two intercultural education training programs for pre- and in-service teachers organized by the University of Thessaly (Volos, Greece). We attempt to map the teachers' common misconceptions about bilingualism by premising upon the initial discussion held with trainees at the beginning of the lectures (and thus before they have been introduced to the ideas of bilingualism), as well as upon the structured interviews that some of the trainees have conducted with in-service teachers.

Literature review: The myths about bilingualism

In western powerful European language speaking societies, monolingualism is considered to be the only "normal" and accepted state of affairs (Wardhaugh 1992). In contrast, bilingualism is associated in the mind of many people with poverty, immigration, minorities, intermarriage, and so on (Skutnabb-Kangas 1984). Consequently, there are several commonsensical ideas about bilingualism which reside in the prejudices linked to this concept. In fact, the negative stereotypes about bilingualism have also dominated the scientific practices until the 1960s; several studies of the time, and most conducted in the U.S., "proved" the cognitive disadvantages of bilingualism by comparing the IQ tests of bilingual students (written all in English ─and thus in L2 for bilinguals) with those of monolinguals (Baker 1996). According to the same author, although scientific evidence has ever since shown ─sometimes even with enormous zeal─ the multiple advantages of bilingual children (e.g. creative thinking, metalinguistic awareness, communicative sensitivity), lay people still seem to hold wrong ideas about bilingualism.

One of the most important myths about bilingualism is the so-called "balance theory", upon which the early studies about bilingualism have been grounded. According to this theory, L1 and L2 are separately stored ─like the two pans of a balance─ in a limited space of the brain of bilinguals. Thus, the more the one language develops, the more the balance tips to the one side. In other words, L1 and L2 develop separately and to the detriment of one another. According to Cummins (1980), this theory promotes the "model of separate underlying proficiency", that is, L1 and L2 are seen as two completely autonomous systems from each other. The balance theory has proven scientifically unsound and has been challenged by the "iceberg theory". This alternative theory regards L1 and L2 as two icebergs above the surface, namely, looking separate from each other, but which are fused under the water. This means that L1 and L2 are controlled by the same central processing system, that is, bilinguals are endowed with a "common underlying proficiency" (Cummins 1980, 1981), and thus irrespectively of the language one speaks or writes, his/her thinking may be made in another language.

Seeing bilingualism in light of the balance theory means two related self-evident and uncontested "truths": that the maintenance of L1 has no utility for the purposes of L2 acquisition, and that the maximum exposure to L2 leads to its more successful and faster learning. More specifically, teachers, in the context of attitude change towards otherness under the influence of intercultural education ideas, have started considering bilingualism as resource by recognizing its benefits, such as cognitive and communicative flexibility, and cultural enrichment (Tsokalidou 2008a). Yet, the supportive arguments for L1 maintenance do not include the positive effect it has on L2 learning. L1 is still viewed as interference for the learning of L2, since it is conceptualized as being separate from L2. In contrast, in the framework of the iceberg theory, L1 and L2 are considered developmentally interdependent (Cummins 2000). This means that the home language of students is not an obstacle but instead supports and contributes significantly to the learning of the majority language, and therefore the more the L1 is developed, the easier the L2 is learned. Numerous studies have confirmed this claim (e.g. Carlisle & Beeman 2000, Collier 1992, López & Tashakkori 2006). Thus, students activate and transfer the literacy skills and concepts they know from L1 to the learning of L2, that is, they exploit their knowledge from L1 in order to approach the unknown land of L2.[2] Consequently, L1 may be absent in monolingual L2 classes but is

[2] Certainly, this is not the only reason why L1 maintenance leads to faster L2 acquisition and to school success. The valuation of a child's mother tongue (and therefore also of his/her identity and culture) at school enhances his/her motivation and self-confidence, which are also closely related to successful educational programs (Skutnabb-Kangas 1988). However, here we only consider the developmental interdependence of L1 and L2, which is a less known issue about bilingualism.

present in the mind of bilingual students, and therefore teachers must build on their students' L1 in order for them to have better chances to develop not only linguistically but also cognitively (Skourtou 2002).

The myth of the maximum exposure to L2 is also closely linked to the supposed separation of L1 from L2. According to this idea, the more a bilingual student is exposed to the target language (L2), the faster and better he/she will learn it (Cummins 2000). Seeing L1 as independent from L2, the former is regarded as wasting valuable time from the learning of the latter. In light of this, teachers often encourage and advise the parents of their bilingual students to use L2 at home (Smith 2004, Sutton 2006, Tsokalidou 2005). Except for the fact that such a recommendation is ultimately detrimental to the overall linguistic and cognitive development of bilinguals, it constitutes an externally imposed replacement of L1 with L2, which is different from the gradual language shift to the majority language often desired and opted for by bilingual families themselves for reasons of social inclusion and mobility (Ogbu 1990).

Another misconception often linked to bilingualism is that bilingual students have difficulty and need much support in the so-called "theoretical" school subjects, such as history and language activities, while they have no problem, or even have advantage, in mathematics and science. This myth resides in the idea that science subjects are supposed to require least language content. However, as sociologists of language (e.g. Bernstein 1990) and sociolinguists (e.g. Gee 1996, Halliday 1998) have shown, the linguistic variety taught and required at school is an "elaborated code" which is structurally distinct (e.g. passive voice, nominalizations, subordinate clauses) from the primary discourse that students bring from home. The elaborated code is appropriate for developing abstract thinking and decontextualized communication, namely, it is needed for the transition that takes place at school from common sense to scientific knowledge. Consequently, the elaborated code is mainly used in science rather than in theoretical school subjects. While all students speak the primary discourse, only those coming from the middle and upper social strata have access to the elaborated code. Therefore, students from lower social strata have a disadvantage at school, since they need to make greater effort to acquire the linguistic code of the school.

Regarding bilingual students, they are expected to learn a specific variety of L2 at school, that is, academic rather than simply conversational L2. According to Cummins (1984), bilinguals need to develop at school "cognitive academic language proficiency", namely, a linguistic variety of L2 with increasing linguistic demands, and not only "basic interpersonal communicative skills". Thomas & Collier (1997) have shown that acquiring academic English is a slow process, taking five to seven years longer than conversational English. Taking into account that many bilinguals (e.g. immigrants) come also from lower social strata, they have no access to the elaborated code of their L1 either. Therefore, in order for these students to transfer concepts from L1 to the learning of L2, the support for further developing L1 should be available throughout their education and not on a short-term basis only (Baker 1996).

Finally, there are many prejudices associated with the linguistic behaviour of bilinguals to alter between L1 and L2 across different or within the same communicative event, a practice known as "code switching" (Gumperz 1982). It is commonly believed that code switching is a random phenomenon, which signals bilinguals' lack of proficiency in the languages they speak, or it is interpreted as a rude behaviour on their part (Wardhaugh 1992). Negative attitudes towards code switching are even held by bilinguals themselves (e.g. Díaz 2004). Such feelings stem from the negative stereotypes associated with bilingualism in

general, but also from the assumption that a bilingual person is, or must be, equal with the total of two monolinguals (Tsokalidou 2008b).

In contrast, ssociolinguistics has indicated that bilinguals exhibit a particular linguistic behaviour by exploiting the resources of the two language systems they speak for their communicative purposes (Gumperz 1982). From this perspective, code switching is a central communicative practice on the part of bilinguals, linked to the social meaning with each language variety is invested. More specifically, bilinguals typically use L1 and L2 in a complementary way (e.g. L1 at home and L2 at school) in terms of the circumstances under which they speak (e.g. topic, participants, purpose). Thus, the situation type predicts which language variety a speaker employs ("situational code switching": ibid.). However, they often alter between codes within the same communicative event when something in the situation has changed, or when the speaker himself/herself wishes to re-negotiate the communicative circumstances, such as the demarcation of the private (through the use of L1) and the public domain (through the use of L2) ("conversational code switching": ibid.). According to Gumperz (ibid.), there is also the case in which a speaker switches code in order to convey a special communicative effect, such as humor, irony, emphasis, disapproval etc. ("metaphorical code switching"). Finally, more practical reasons may impose code switching, such as clarification ("interpretative code switching": Romaine 1994).

From the above, it is concluded that code switching is an utterly explicable phenomenon, constituting a way for the bilinguals to make their language choices depending on the situational context. However, since language is primarily a symbol of social identity, code switching also signals the fluid and dual nature of the bilinguals' identity (Tsokalidou 2008b). On the other hand, code switching is a completed structured phenomenon, following specific rules. In fact, it has been found that when code switching occurs within a turn, there are specific linguistic rules for its constraints, such as the "equivalence constraint", according to which code switching only occurs where languages structurally overlap (e.g. Poplack 1980).

Although myths about bilingualism have been clearly pinpointed in the relevant literature, there are quite a few empirical studies exploring whether and to what extent teachers in general, as well in different socio-cultural settings, hold some or most of these misconceptions. The limited research in the area —addressing only few of the above myths— suggests that most educators, in different countries and socio-cultural contexts, share the myth of the maximum exposure to L2 (e.g. Mehmedbegovic 2008, Smith 2004, Sutton 2006). The few Greek studies show that the same seems to hold true for Greek teachers (Philippardou 1997, Tsokalidou 2005, 2008a, Vratsalis & Skourtou 2000). In this paper, we attempt to contribute to the filling of this gap, by mapping Greek teachers' thoughts about bilingualism with respect to the above myths presented. Since the teachers participating in our study form a widely heterogeneous group (i.e. geographical background, years of teaching experience, working either in primary or in secondary schools), we are able to explore whether there are some patterns of commonalities about bilingualism shared by most Greek educators in general.

According to Beardsmore (2003), myths about bilingualism are particularly resistant in societies with no or few experience of multilingualism, in which bilingualism is the exception and monolingualism the norm. Moreover, these myths seem to be associated with societies which feel threatened by the influx of massive immigration (Marshall 1986). Greek society constitutes a similar case, in which in the last two decades a considerable surge of immigrants from the Balkans have come, among other countries, to Greece. This mosaic of people has disturbed the imagined "homogeneity" upon which the Modern Greek nation was

established (Michail 2008). Consequently, it is hypothesized that Greek teachers would share most of the above myths about bilingualism.

Greek teachers' common misconceptions about bilingualism: Evidence from the intercultural education training programs

The context of the study

In this paper, we present empirical data as emerging from the teaching experience gained from two intercultural education training programs for pre- and in-service teachers organized by the University of Thessaly (Volos, Greece). The two training programs lasted from January to June 2007 and 2008. The teachers enrolled in the programs were exposed to general issues of intercultural education (e.g. otherness, racism, multiculturalism and science), as well as to topics being relevant to the Greek case (e.g. immigrants in Greece, emigrant Greeks, Greek minorities, intercultural schools in Greece). The central aim of the training programs was to equip teachers with scientific information about intercultural education, in order for them to cope with the challenges posed by the contemporary culturally diverse Greek school, as well as to actively engage them in small research projects exploring by themselves some intercultural education topic under the supervision of the programs' instructors.

The first author was responsible for teaching the sociolinguistic topics relevant to interculturalism. Specifically, she introduced teachers to the notion and types of bilingualism, to the models of bilingual education, and to the form of education offered to bilingual students in Greece. With the aim to cast the net a little wider, she also taught them about linguistic variation at school (e.g. geographical, social), approaching bilingualism as a particular type of linguistic diversity. During the lectures, she put emphasis on the common ideas circulating about bilingualism, asking for the trainees' thoughts, before providing them with the way these myths have been challenged by scientific evidence. At the end of the programs, in the context of the small research projects conducted by all trainees, she prepared a questionnaire about bilingualism consisting of close-ended questions, and gave it to some of the trainees in order for them to carry out structured interviews with in-service teachers who did not enroll in the training programs. The aim of this procedure was for the trainees to explore whether their colleagues had similar ideas about bilingualism with themselves before participating in the program.

Consequently, in this paper, we map teachers' misconceptions as derived from the initial discussion held with trainees at the beginning of the lectures (and thus before they have been introduced to the ideas of bilingualism), as well as upon the structured interviews that some of the trainees have conducted with in-service teachers. The trainees who enrolled in the training program of each year (2007 and 2008) were approximately one hundred fifty, divided in two even groups. The one group was taught in Volos (city of central Greece), and the other in Athens (Greek capital, located in the south). Both groups were taught on the same topics by the same instructors. Trainees represented a widely heterogeneous group. They were both pre- and in-service teachers (with varying degree of teaching experience), working most of them in secondary schools (but some also in primary schools), and teaching both language and science subjects (though most of them were language teachers). Trainees were also geographically dispersed. The group of trainees in Volos came mostly from Thessaly (rural area in central Greece) and from Thessaloniki (the second biggest Greek city, located in the north), while the group in Athens came mainly from Athens and southern Greece. Similarly, the in-service

teachers (N=108) who served as interviewees formed a highly diverse group, being compiled by teachers whom the trainees could access.[3]

As a result, due to the conditions under which the empirical data were collected, we could not isolate the possible factors determining the teachers' perceptions about bilingualism. Our aim, instead, is to see whether there are some common patterns in the misconceptions Greek teachers hold about bilingualism, despite their heterogeneity. We believe that this question is particularly relevant to the designers of intercultural education programs aiming at general populations of teachers.

Finally, it should be noted that the two sources of empirical data (i.e. discussion with trainees about bilingualism during the lectures, structured interviews conducted by trainees with in-service students) are linked to two distinct social activities in which teachers' ideas about bilingualism were examined, affecting the way their thoughts developed. Thus, in the present study, we take the view that attitudes and beliefs are not fixed entities to be simply extracted by the researcher, but are dynamic ones closely knitted to the situational context in which they should be interpreted (e.g. Antaki & Widdicombe 1998). Specifically, in the discussion about bilingualism during the lectures, the teachers examined were trainees enrolled (on a voluntary basis) in an intercultural education program. This means that these educators might not possess specialized knowledge about the ideas of interculturalism and bilingualism, but we could assume that they had probably an interest and sensitivity towards these issues. On the other hand, the institutional presence of the instructor might increase the so-called "social desirability effect" on their responses, which refers to the danger of social researcher to collect "'politically correct' attitudes rather than the 'real' attitudes of respondents" (Smith 2004: 131). In contrast, the structured interviews were conducted out of the context of intercultural education, and hence with teachers not necessarily sensitized to relevant issues. Moreover, the interviewees could probably speak more openly about bilingualism before their colleagues (i.e. trainees as interviewers) rather than under the influence of the institutional role of the instructor. Taking all this contextual information into account, in the next section, we present teachers' ideas about bilingualism as emerging from these two different sources of data.

Greek teachers' ideas about bilingualism

One of the topics discussed with trainees and explored through the interviews with in-service teachers was whether the L1 of bilingual students should be maintained and why. It is noteworthy that not only ─quite expectedly─ trainees, but almost unanimously the interviewed teachers (90% ± 2%; mean ± standard deviation) responded supportively for the maintenance of L1.[4] The reasons provided by trainees for L1 maintenance were linked to the ideas of interculturalism, such as "it is a cultural capital", "it enriches children cognitively and communicatively", and "it is a symbol of identity". Interviewees were more restrictive in their answers, relating language mainly to issues of identity (66% ± 20%). It should be pointed out that none of the trainees mentioned that L1 maintenance could facilitate L2 acquisition, while, although interviewees were provided with this alternative, very few of them opted for this answer (4% ± 1%). This comes in contrast to the trainees' view during the discussion with them that L1 does not interfere in the learning of L2. This contradiction might by explained

[3] The trainees (participating as groups in three different research projects) who conducted interviews with in-service teachers were in alphabetical order the following: A. Alexandridou, A. Balassi, I. Konstantinidou, D. Lazaridis, I. Stamopoulos, P. Toumbelis, D. Tzara and V. Vassiliou.

[4] In brackets, quantitative results from the interviews are provided. They involve the mean and the standard deviation of interview results as derived from the three different research projects of trainees.

by the social desirability effect. Although trainees hesitated to associate L1 with the negatively connoted word "interference", they were unable to see the positive effect of L1 on the learning of L2 either. On the other hand, interviewees more openly admitted that L1 makes more difficult the learning of L2 (50% ± 15%), or that neither helped nor hindered L2 acquisition (21% ± 8%).

Regarding the myth of the maximum exposure to L2, few of the trainees during the discussion believed that bilingual students should use L2 at home. Instead, most of them thought that students should be taught L1 and use it with their parents and relatives. In contrast, during interviews, many teachers admitted to have often advised the parents of their bilingual students to use L2 at home (68% ± 12%). Moreover, although some of the interviewees supported the use of L1 at home (32% ± 15%), very few of them were favourable towards its teaching (10% ± 2%). This brings out an important issue, namely, that L1 maintenance is seen by teachers as a "right" rather than as a "resource" for bilinguals. The former view means that the responsibility for L1 maintenance rests in the bilingual community itself, whereas the latter recognizes the institutional role of the host country to give bilinguals the opportunity to learn systematically L1 (Baker 1996).

The myth that science and mathematics subjects require less proficiency in L2 than do theoretical and language subjects, and thus that the former pose less learning difficulties for bilinguals than the latter, seems to be a widely shared misconception by Greek educators in general. Specifically, both trainees and interviewees believed that bilingual students have disadvantage in theoretical subjects such as history (interviewees: 67% ± 15%), while they have no problem (interviewees: 62% ± 18%), or even advantage in mathematics (interviewees: 55% ± 19%). Interestingly, during the discussion with them, some of the trainees supported this view by saying that "mathematics is a universal language and way of thinking, and therefore is independent from one's mother tongue", while "history contains difficult wording", and that "bilingual students are not interested in the history of another country". Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that most teachers (both trainees and interviewees) believed that bilingual students' failure at school is not an exclusively linguistic problem (interviewees: 23% ± 9%), but recognized the social dimension of school failure as well (interviewees: 56% ± 21%). Some of the social factors mentioned by trainees were the "lack of parental support" and "phenomena of racism and social exclusion at school that some bilingual students undergo".

Finally, with respect to code switching, trainees said that they had noticed this linguistic behaviour: e.g. "sometimes students resort to words of their L1", "some words of their L1 may crop up while talking". Despite the fact that they did not believe that this behaviour was made at random, they could not supply any explanation for this either. In interviews, on the other hand, although most teachers were knowledgeable of this phenomenon (81% ± 18%), there were also some who admitted to ignore it (25% ± 16%). Moreover, contrary to trainees, many interviewed teachers believed that this behaviour was made at random (38% ± 10%), while some of them responded to have noticed this phenomenon when bilinguals wished to exclude Greeks from their conversation (10% ±2%). Being provided with alternatives as possible explanations for code switching, most interviewees responded that it was due to lack of L2 proficiency (63% ±16%), while less teachers attributed this behaviour to communicative purposes (16% ±6%). Quite interestingly, some of them believed that it was a signal of impoliteness (11% ±8%). Regarding the management of code switching by teachers, most of the trainees answered that it should not be corrected by teachers. In contrast, interviewees were quite ambivalent: some of them responded that code switching should be brought to the attention of their bilingual students

(31% ±9%), others that it should be ignored (37% ±6%), and others that it should be corrected (37% ±23%).

Conclusions

Due to the distinct social activities knitted to the two sources of empirical data, some inconsistencies in the teachers' ideas about bilingualism were revealed. Specifically, in the discussion during the lectures, teachers tended to provide more politically correct answers about bilingualism than in the interviews, probably due to the presence of instructor, and because they responded in the framework of an intercultural education program. Although the interviewed teachers spoke more openly about bilingualism (e.g. by admitting that they encouraged the parents of their bilingual students to use L2 at home, and that they attributed code switching to the lack of L2 proficiency), during the discussion, teachers provided us with more qualitative data, such as the reasons why they believed bilingual students had advantage in science and mathematics subjects, or the underlying social factors of school failure. Moreover, despite the fact that teachers formed a highly diverse group, most of them seemed to share the same ideas about bilingualism. The teachers' consensus is clearly indicated in the quantitative results of the interviews, in which the standard deviation among the different research projects of trainees ranged from ± 1% to ± 23%.

Hence, the present study suggests that some shared patterns of commonalities regarding bilingualism do exist among Greek teachers. In fact, Greek educators seem to hold most of the commonest myths circulating about bilingualism. This signals Greek society's immaturity in issues of bilingualism, being for many years a monolingual country sending emigrants to settle to the U.S., Australia, Germany and Sweden, rather than a multilingual one hosting immigrants from the Balkans. We believe that intercultural education in general, and Greek one in particular making its initial steps, should consider the misconceptions as revealed by this study for the design of more efficient educational programs aiming at dispersing prejudices and commonsensical ideas about bilingualism.

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