Managing multiple normativities in classroom interaction: Student responses to teacher reproaches for inappropriate language choice in a bilingual classroom

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ABSTRACT

This article adds to research on bilingual language alternation by investigating how language choice is managed at the crossroads of social norms and rules in the interaction of a bilingual classroom. Drawing on conversation analytic methodology, the paper examines sequences in which the teacher invokes a locally established, explicit rule whereby the students are to use L2 only in the classroom. Sequential analyses focus on how students respond to such teacher turns, addressing either the teacher or their peers, and how they align with the classroom rule in their responses. It is argued that when responding to rule-enforcement, students position themselves not only as regards the behavioural norm set by the particular classroom rule, but also in terms of teacher authority to regulate behaviour via such a rule. The implications of these micro-interactional findings to the social and ideological order of bilingual classrooms are briefly discussed.

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Introduction

Social norms, in the sense of largely implicit expectations that are constitutive of action and its interpretation (see Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 1984, pp. 103–134), are an integral part of activities across a range of settings. Educational institutions are particularly interesting sites for investigating the normative nature of social conduct because they routinely bring to the surface an interface where classroom rules, designed to establish social order and to socialise students into the wider community, and students' own norms meet. Even if classroom rules set locally defined norms of conduct, they and the authority to enforce them are open to students' normative treatment in classroom interaction – in other words, rules can be accepted, rejected and subverted in many different ways. This article investigates the interactional work by members in a bilingual classroom at this kind of a crossroads between rules and norms. By doing so, the paper aims to tease out some differences between how these two notions organise language choice in the bilingual classroom.

In prior research on language education, normative orientations towards language choice and language alternation have mostly been studied in classrooms in which two or more languages are available to the participants. Examples of such bilingual settings include different kinds of immersion and content-and-language-integrated (CLIL) classrooms – in which the students often share a first language (L1) – as well as induction or 'sheltered' classrooms for recent immigrants, which typically have students whose first languages differ. The label 'bilingual education' can sometimes be misleading, as many

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such programmes emphasise and even prioritise the role of students' second (L2) as opposed to first (L1) language. And while non-language subjects, such as history or geography, which these programmes teach through L2 are an important part of their curricula, an equally if not more significant part of curricular aims relate to learning the L2 itself. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that a salient issue in such classrooms is that students indeed use the L2 as opposed to their L1, and thereby 'make the most' of their language learning opportunities. Some of the specific local practices for monitoring L1 use have also been described by previous sociolinguistic and conversation analytic studies (see e.g. Amir & Musk, 2013; Bonacina & Gafaranga, 2011; Copp Jinkerson, 2011; Copp Mökkönen, 2012). Beyond the procedural level of classrooms, bilingual students' language use is also prescribed by top-down educational policies, such as the Proposition 227 in California, which has reduced bilingual teaching in the state by directing non-English speaking students to English-only instruction. L1 use in the classroom is also a highly debated and contested issue in the English-medium instruction offered by schools in Hong Kong (see Li, 2015). These factors make 'bilingual' classrooms a very informative research context for studying the normative treatment of language choice in the educational praxis of classroom interaction.

The present study uses a conversation analytic (CA) approach to investigate in detail the interactional practices through which language choice is negotiated in a secondary school bilingual classroom. More specifically, the study examines how students respond to teacher actions that invoke a monolingual, L2-only classroom interaction as an already agreed-upon rule, a locally explicated maxim of conduct that is expected to be known by all participants. Such situations in which teachers regulate students' ways of participating in the classroom also provide an interesting context for investigating how teacher authority to regulate conduct is maintained, responded to and negotiated by classroom participants. While previous interactional research has brought to surface practices of subversion in such situations, the main analytical attention has been directed to understanding how practices of reproaching and sanctioning students for prohibited behaviour in general index power and particular language policies (e.g. Amir & Musk, 2013; Copp Mökkönen, 2012). This paper adds to the prior literature an analysis of how students treat classroom rules and teacher authority in their interactional uptakes of teacher's regulative actions. The analysis will show some ways in which students can in their responses display less than full alignment and compliance with the conduct norm demanded from them in ways that nevertheless do not openly oppose the teacher's authority to set such a norm via a rule. Managing their normative conflict in this way allows bilingual classroom participants to maintain multiple norms in their encounters, but as a consequence, leaves the monolingual ideology of their classroom practice unquestioned.

The normativity of language choice in bilingual and multilingual classrooms

The relationship between different languages represents a key focus in research on bi- and multilingual education, be that in studies that have documented the 'parallel monolingualism' (Heller, 2006) of bilingual classrooms, considered what might be the optimal L1 use for second language learning (e.g. Macaro, 2009), explored different kinds of multilingual/translanguaging practices (e.g. Creese & Blackledge, 2010) or investigated the functional aspects of classroom code-switching and language alternation (Gierlinger, 2015; Kontio & Sylvén, 2015; Lehti-Eklund, 2012; Lin, 2013; Üstünel & Seedhouse, 2005). The normative nature of language choice has also been examined by prior microanalytical studies of classroom interaction. Many of these have investigated either what kinds of social norms and identities are (implicitly) constructed when bilingual participants select one language over the other or how the overt sanctioning of a participant's language choice indexes 'practiced language policies' (Bonacina-Pugh, 2012) in multilingual classrooms.

As for the implicit norms that organise language choice in bilingual classrooms, a key focus in prior studies has been the investigation of how the ways in which conversational activities such as word searches and code-switching are accomplished embody an orientation to either a monolingual or a multilingual medium of interaction (e.g. Bonacina & Gafaranga, 2011; Cromdal, 2005; Slotte-Lüttge, 2007). Investigating an induction classroom for newly-arrived immigrants in France, Bonacina-Pugh (2012) argues that participants orient to a monolingual (L1) medium of interaction for example by engaging in a word search to maintain interaction in L2 as opposed to simply providing the sought item in L1 when participants share one. On the other hand, the sheer possibility of using two languages in interaction does not necessarily mean that participants treat their medium of interaction as multilingual. This is the case, for example, in language alternation that speakers specifically mark as a code-switch (CS) or otherwise problematic. Drawing on Auer's (1984) work on bilingual conversation, Slotte-Lüttge (2007) proposes that contextualisation cues such as hesitation, volume changes, or subsequent translation or explanation of the CS expression work to signal the 'other-languageness' of the switched-to language and treat the CS action as interactionally problematic. This suggests that somewhat paradoxically certain types of code-switches may be among the resources that can be used to constructing bilingual classrooms as monolingually normative. In her analysis, Slotte-Lüttge (2007) shows how a bilingual teacher and her native-Finnish speaking students in a Swedish-medium primary school not only work considerably to come up with L2 expressions to avoid switching to L1, but when they 'have to' do so, they quickly restore monolingual order in the classroom by translating the L1 items into L2.

On the other hand, bilingual classroom participants do not necessarily uphold any one of the two languages they have access to as the normative and primary language from which departures are somehow extraordinary. Rather, they may also orient to a combination of the two as the unmarked medium of interaction, as shown by Bonacina and Gafaranga (2011). Instruction can also be designedly multilingual, as is the case with different kinds of translanguaging practices (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). To give an example, Bonacina-Pugh (2013) describes how through what she terms as multilingual label quests, a teacher of an induction classroom prompts her students to translate vocabulary items to their different L1s in the