

## THE EFFECT OF HOME LANGUAGE PRACTICES AND BILINGUAL SCHOOLING IN THE PRODUCTION OF GRAMMATICAL ASPECT

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the present paper is twofold: to investigate (a) the production of grammatical aspect in bilingual speakers who attend different educational settings and (b) the effect of educational setting on the development of grammatical aspect. Previous studies have shown that biliteracy (i.e. literacy support in both languages) and bilingual schooling positively affects language development. Similarly, other studies suggest that biliterate bilingual speakers often perform better than monoliterate bilingual speakers in grammatical aspect, conceivably, due to their cognitive bilingual advantage; even though they might lag behind in vocabulary knowledge. One hundred forty-five bilingual children (Greek-Albanian and Greek-German) aged eight to twelve participated in the present study. Our participants attended different educational settings. Grammatical aspect was tested by means of linguistic task (i.e. a Grammaticality Judgment and a Sentence Correction Task), where (un-)grammatical sentences were presented and the participants should either repeat the grammatical sentences or correct the ungrammatical ones. The results revealed that most of the participants preferred to use perfective over imperfective aspect; however, bilinguals who attend the monolingual schooling equally used the two features of aspect. Most of the participants preferred prototypical choices, i.e. they used the prepositional phrase *for X time* with imperfective aspect and the prepositional phrase *in X time* with perfective aspect. Finally, home language use before the age of six (home language history) seems to predict the performance on the linguistic task but only for the bilinguals that attend a bilingual educational setting.

**Keywords:** Mono-/bi-lingual schooling, home language input, grammatical aspect, Grammaticality Judgment, Sentence Correction Task.

### INTRODUCTION

Bilingualism has different profiles and confounding parameters that affect bilingual speakers (Grosjean 1989). More specifically, input – either before or after the age of schooling – literacy practices or educational setting seem to affect bilingual speaker's language development.

In terms of the role of input, many studies relate the amount of linguistic input to language development (Thordardottir 2011, Chondrogianni and Marinis 2011, Bedore et al., 2012 Unsworth 2014). Thus, the more language exposure, the more it will positively influence the development of that language. Nonetheless, Gathercole (2002a, 2002b) found that the crucial role of input is evident up to an age. At this point we should note that the role of input and the amount that is required remains a quite debatable issue.

In respect to educational setting/schooling recent studies have found that the educational setting plays a significant role in bilinguals' linguistic and cognitive development (Cobo-Lewis et al. 2002; Oller and Eilers 2002; Dosi 2019; Dosi, Papadopoulou, and Tsimpli 2016a; Dosi and Papadopoulou 2019). More specifically, bilingual education is found to have a positive impact

on vocabulary knowledge (Cobo-Lewis et al. 2002; Oller and Eilers 2002; Dosi 2019). In addition, bilingual children who attend a bilingual schooling demonstrate higher cognitive abilities compared to bilinguals who attend either a monolingual educational setting or an educational setting, where both languages are not equally supported (Cobo-Lewis et al. 2002; Oller and Eilers 2002; Dosi and Papadopoulou 2019). Moreover, some studies have noted that the advanced cognitive skills in bilinguals, who attend a bilingual school, compensate for lower language proficiency (Tsimpli et al. 2015) and for lower skills in the acquisition of grammatical aspect (Dosi, Papadopoulou, and Tsimpli 2016a).

Grammatical aspect is a complex grammatical phenomenon and many factors affect it. For instance, recent research has shown that language input, educational setting, vocabulary knowledge and cognitive abilities have an impact on the acquisition of grammatical aspect (Dosi et al. 2016a; Dosi and Papadopoulou 2019; for a review see Dosi 2016).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Bilingualism is characterized by heterogeneity, since many different factors affect bilingual speakers' language acquisition and development. Thus almost every bilingual speaker has a unique profile and possibly that is the reason why studies end up with different and confounding findings. Some of the most important factors that affect their language abilities are home language use and schooling.

Home language use is one of the most important factors that affect bilingual language development. However, its precise role in language acquisition remains controversial. More specifically, there is no consensus, among the researchers, in terms of the amount of linguistic input required for a successful language acquisition and, additionally, whether all aspects of language can be acquired entirely through input (Valian 1999, for a detailed review). Many studies have found a positive correlation between the input and the vocabulary knowledge (Cobo-Lewis et al. 2002; Oller and Eilers 2002; Dosi 2019); while others claim (Barreña Ezeizabarrena and García 2008) that if the amount of input in one language is at least 60% the bilingual speakers perform similarly to monolinguals. Other studies suggested that the impact of input on the acquisition of language is important up to the age of ten (Gathercole 2002a; 2002b). Apart from the quantity of input, the quality of input is also of paramount importance (Goldberg, Paradis and Crago 2008; Chondrogianni and Marinis 2011). Continuing this line of reasoning, the quality of input can counterbalance the lack of the quantity of input (Unsworth 2014).

Educational setting is also an important factor that affects bilingual language development. Previous studies exhibited that bilingual children who attended bilingual schools, where both languages were equally supported, performed better in vocabulary tasks in both languages compared to children who are educated only in the majority language, i.e. the language of the community (Cobo-Lewis et al. 2002; Oller and Eilers 2002; Dosi 2019). In a study by Dosi and colleagues (2016a) it has been found that bilinguals who attended a bilingual educational setting scored higher in a cognitive task compared to bilinguals who attended a monolingual educational setting. Linguistic abilities, i.e. performance on grammatical aspect, were also positively affected by cognitive performance of bilingual schooling, since no differences were detected in the linguistic task between the two bilingual groups (of the bilingual and monolingual schooling), even though the former group lagged behind the latter group in vocabulary knowledge. The finding possibly suggests that grammatical aspect is a feature that

lies in interfaces (morphosyntax and semantics) and, thus, involves cognitive skills (Dosi 2016; Dosi et al. 2016a).

Sentence Repetition Tasks require imitation and corrected imitation of (un-) grammatical sentences (Munnich, Flynn and Martohardjono 1994). According to Munnich and colleagues (1994) there is a substantial difference between the Grammaticality Judgment Tasks and Sentence Repetition Tasks. The former focus on speaker's implicit knowledge, whereas the latter on elicit more explicit linguistic knowledge (DeKeyser 2003; Erlam 2006; Norris and Ortega 2000). Additionally, Sentence Repetition Tasks depict the speaker's interlanguage and thus any linguistic deficits. There is a long discussion about whether Sentence Repetition Tasks measure linguistic and/or working memory abilities; since this issue is beyond the scope of the present study, it will not be discussed any further. Very briefly, some studies claim that the role of memory is crucial in these tasks (Alloway and Gathercole 2005; Alloway et al. 2004). By contrast, other studies have not found any involvement of memory in Sentence Repetition Task performance (Okura and Lonsdale 2012; Dosi et al. 2016a). Notwithstanding, many recent studies suggest that Sentence Repetition Tasks depict both linguistic and cognitive abilities (Riches, 2012; Klem et al. 2015). The interaction is more evident in short sentences (Fattal et al. 2011), since processing is less demanding and memory abilities are more predominant in these sentences (Alloway et al., 2004). Many studies that test bilingual and second language speakers Sentence Repetition Tasks as a tool for measuring general language abilities (Ellis 2005, Erlam 2006; Chondrogianni et al. 2013). Studies in bilingual children have manifested that age of onset to bilingualism and input are reliable predictors for the bilinguals' performance (Chiat et al. 2013). Klem et al. (2015) suggests that Sentence Repetition Task is a complex linguistic task that depicts language processing at many different levels, such as speech perception, vocabulary knowledge, grammatical skills and speech production. Studies on bilingualism and second language have shown that, apart from processing, Sentence Repetition Tasks utilize language representations and provide an indication of general language proficiency (Chaudron and Russell, 1990; Munnich et al., 1994; Dosi et al. 2016a).

Grammatical aspect depicts the perspective of the speaker (Binnick 1991; Smith 1991). Some languages grammaticalize aspect (i.e. Greek, Albanian, etc.); while others not (i.e. German, Hungarian, etc.); thus, aspect is lexically encoded. In Greek aspect is divided into perfective (completed event) and imperfective (ongoing/uncompleted event) values. Perfective aspect is acquired earlier than imperfective aspect (Shirai and Andersen 1995; Bardovi-Harlig 2000). Despite that some languages do not grammaticalize aspect, most of the languages allocate lexical aspect. Lexical aspect refers to the inherent properties of verbs and their predicates. Vendler (1957) divides verbs into four categories: *states* (love), *activities* (build), *accomplishments* (build a house), and *achievements* (lose my wallet). The inherent properties of *states* and *activities* do not imply a completed event; while *accomplishments* and *achievements* imply an endpoint. Smith (1991) adds another aspectual class, i.e. *semelfactive* verbs, such as *cough* or *knock*. Semelfactives are similar to achievements; however, they do not encode an endpoint whereas achievements do. They refer to repeated events. Prototypical choices are the cases when the grammatical aspect coincides with the inherent properties of the verb. For instance, if we use imperfective aspect with *states*, *activities* and *semelfactives* and perfective aspect with *accomplishments* and *achievements*. Grammatical and lexical aspect can also interact when prepositional phrases (PP), i.e. *for/in X time*, are used. Thus, prototypical choices are when imperfective aspect is used with *states*, *activities* and *semelfactives* and the

PP *for X time*; by contrast other prototypical choices are when *accomplishments* and *achievements* are used with perfective aspect and the PP *in X time*<sup>1</sup>.

Since there is a lack of studies investigating the effect of educational setting and input on bilinguals' linguistic development as well as the acquisition of grammatical aspect in bilingual children with Greek as one of their spoken languages, the present study aims to address this gap using a Grammaticality Judgement and Sentence Correction Task.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

In the present study, one hundred forty-five bilingual children aged eight to twelve participated<sup>2</sup>. The bilingual speakers were either Greek-Albanian or Greek-German. The bilingual speakers attended different types of educational settings, while monolingual speakers attended Greek public schools. Before presenting the profile of the participants, it is useful to clarify the different educational settings. In the present study, our participants attended three different types of educational settings: (a) *Greek-dominant schools*, (b) *bilingual schools* (henceforth BL schools) and (c) *monolingual schools* (henceforth ML schools).

In the study participated children who attend Greek public schools in Germany, where the main language of instructions was Greek (21 hours per week), while some subjects (such as History, Geography and Physics) were taught in German (10 hours per week). The teachers used predominately Greek and the students also used mostly Greek to interact with each other; since the students are Greek-German children who live in Germany. Henceforth we refer to these schools as *Greek-dominant schools*. The second type was the *bilingual schools* in Germany and Albania. The students have been taught most of the time in both languages and their classmates were either bilingual or monolingual German/Albanian-speaking children, while about 1/3 of the program is taught in Greek (10-16 hours per week). Most of the teachers were also bilinguals or monolinguals depending on the subject that they taught. The last type was the Greek monolingual public schools (in Greece), where the lesson was exclusively in Greek and the students did not receive support in their first language (i.e. in Albanian). These students predominately interacted in Greek with their monolingual classmates and rarely in Albanian with the other Greek-Albanian students.

The majority of the bilingual participants (62 out of 145 participants, 42.8%) went to monolingual educational context. Many of the participants (47 out of 145 participants, 32.4%) attended a Greek-dominant educational setting, while the minority (36 out of 145 participants, 24.8%) went to a bilingual school.

### Material

#### *Child Questionnaires*

A child questionnaire was used (Mattheoudakis, Chatzidaki & Maligkoudi 2014) which included information about four major categories (a) home language history, (b) current language use, (c) early literacy practices and (d) current literacy practices. *Home language history* denotes the language exposure to each language from birth until the age of six (i.e. until the age of age of schooling). *Current language use* indicates the language preferences for daily activities (i.e. memorizing phone numbers, calculating, telling the time or watching television),

<sup>1</sup> The discussion about the interaction of lexical and grammatical aspect is too long and the scope of this paper is to presented it briefly. This reference is by no means an extensive review.

<sup>2</sup> For the scope of the present study the performance of monolinguals was not included, since the aim is to compare the performance of bilinguals who attend different educational settings.

oral interaction with family members and friends and the language that they feel they understand or speak better. *Early literacy practices* relate to activities such as shared-book reading in preschool age. *Current literacy practices* refer to questions regarding language preferences for writing (texting, emailing, writing cards or lists) and reading (book or comics reading, reading aloud, visiting websites, video gaming); also questions about the language that they feel more comfortable to read and write in and, finally, about the language classes they attended in either language.

### *Baseline Tasks*

Two baseline tasks were administered to all participants in order to identify their (non-)verbal abilities. A standardized Greek expressive vocabulary task was used in order to test their vocabulary knowledge in Greek (Vogindroukas et al. 2009). The bilinguals were also tested in their verbal abilities in Albanian or German by means of expressive vocabulary tasks in their second language (Kapia and Kananaj, 2013; Petermann, 2010; respectively). The participants' non-verbal abilities, i.e. fluid intelligence, were measured by means of a non-verbal intelligence task (Raven, Raven & Court 1998), in order to ensure that all children have normal or above normal non-verbal intelligence.

### *Grammaticality Judgment & Sentence Correction Task*

The linguistic task was an offline sentence repetition and correction task (designed by Dosi 2016), which was administered in a PowerPoint version. All sentences were taped and auditory presented. In the task there were target sentences and fillers. The length of the target sentences was between eighteen and twenty-three syllables (mean length 18.4 syllables) and of the fillers were between sixteen and twenty-one syllables (mean length 19.1 syllables). The conditions under investigation were (a) grammatical aspect in Greek (perfective, imperfective), (b) lexical aspect (the categories of activities, states and semelfactive verbs; three verbs per category) and (c) the PPs (*for/ in X time*). The target sentences were thirty-six; an equal number of fillers was also provided. The total number of sentences were seventy-two, administered in two sessions; in each session target-sentences and fillers are mixed in equal numbers. Half of the sentences were grammatical and half were ungrammatical (for more details see Dosi et al. 2016a). During the task the child listens to each sentence and either repeats it as presented if it was grammatical or repeats it corrected if it was ungrammatical. There was a warm-up session, so that the participants became familiar with the procedure. The participants listened to the stories via headphones and their responses were recorded. In terms of the scoring, if the sentence produced by the child was grammatical, they received 1 point; whereas if the sentence was ungrammatical, they received 0 points. The total score was 36.

## **RESULTS**

Some of the major findings of the questionnaires reveal that the participants who attend a bilingual educational setting had more exposure to both languages from birth until today. Similarly, their literacy was predominately conducted in both languages. The participants who attend the Greek-dominant school were mainly exposed to Greek language from birth until today and their literacy was also in Greek. The students who attend the monolingual school were exposed to either Greek or Albanian before the age of six; while after the age of schooling they were exposed mainly to Greek. Similar are the findings for the early and later literacy practices.

In the baseline tasks the findings are as follows: in the Greek vocabulary, the speakers who attended a monolingual school scored higher than the other two groups [ $F(2,142)=20.319$ ,

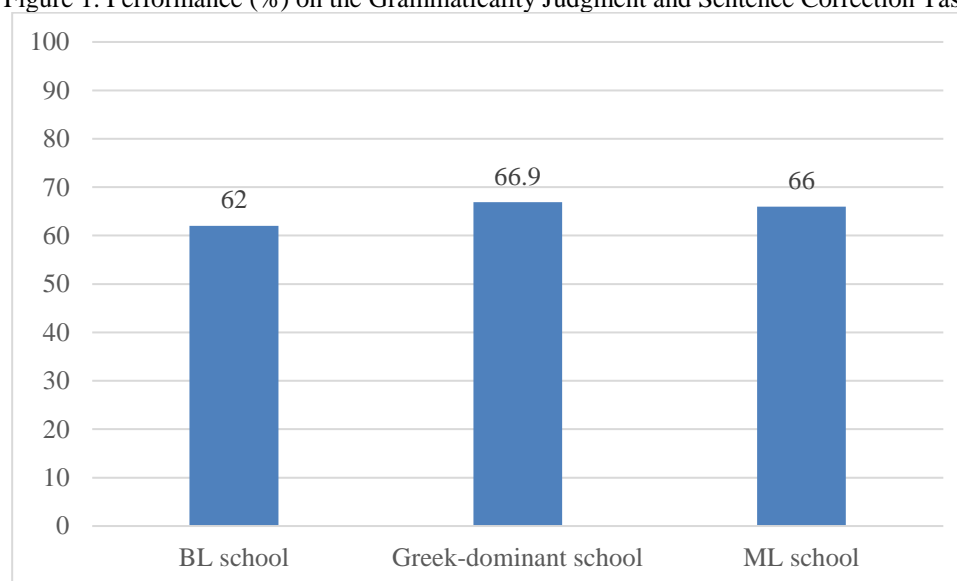
$p < .001$ ; Bonferroni criteria:  $p < .001$ , for all comparisons], which do not differ significantly. In the vocabulary in the "other language", the speakers who attended a bilingual school performed better than the other two groups [ $F(2,142) = 15.476$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Bonferroni criteria:  $p < .001$  for all comparisons].

Table 1. Participants' performance on the baseline tasks

	Age	Vocabulary in Greek (SD)	Vocabulary in Albanian/German (SD)
<b>BL school</b>	62	74.9% (13.2)	60.7% (16.5)
<b>Greek-dominant school</b>	36	55.1% (20.2)	78.8% (9.4)
<b>ML school</b>	47	63.1% (13.6)	66.4% (17.8)

In the Grammaticality Judgment and the Sentence Correction Task ANOVA tests have shown that the groups did not differ in their general performance [ $F(2,144) = 2.447$ ,  $p = .090$ ] (see Figure 1). When we focus on participants' performance, we observe that most of the participants used more often the perfective over imperfective aspect. The students that attend the monolinguals educational setting they used equally perfective and imperfective aspect. Most of the participants used more the PP *for X time* than the PP *in X time*. In terms of the use of PP with grammatical aspect, the majority of the speakers prefer prototypical choices, i.e. PP *for X time* with imperfective aspect and PP *in X time* with perfective aspect. Verb categories do not seem to affect aspectual and PP choices.

Figure 1. Performance (%) on the Grammaticality Judgment and Sentence Correction Task.



Explaining participants' performance, we run stepwise regressions for each group separately. Interestingly, predictor variables were found only in participants who attend a bilingual school and not in the other groups. The results exhibited that the use of both languages before the age of six (home language history) predicts 13.9% their performance on the grammaticality judgment and the sentence correction task [ $R^2 = .139$ ,  $F(1,34) = 5.466$ ,  $p = .025$ ,  $\beta = .294$ ].

## DISCUSSION

The present study explored the production of grammatical aspect in bilingual speakers who attend different educational settings and the effect of educational setting on the development of grammatical aspect by means of a Grammaticality Judgment and a Sentence Correction Task. One hundred forty-five Greek-Albanian and Greek-German bilingual children aged eight

to twelve were tested. They went to different types of educational settings (bilingual, monolingual and Greek-dominant schools).

Considering their language use and literacy practices, the bilinguals exhibit different profiles. The bilinguals who attended a bilingual school used both languages more often than the other two groups. Bilinguals who attended either a Greek-dominant or a monolingual school preferred Greek more often in both their language use and their literacy practices. Interestingly, the latter group preferred to use Greek after the age of schooling (after the attendance to the monolingual school in Greece). Their language and literacy practices are depicted in the performance on the vocabulary tasks, with the sole exception of the bilinguals who attend a Greek-dominant educational setting, who scored higher in the vocabulary in German; possibly because they country of residence (Germany).

The findings from the Grammaticality Judgment and Sentence Correction Task confirm previous studies; hence most of the participants preferred to use perfective over imperfective aspect (Shirai and Andersen 1995; Bardovi-Harlig 2000). Bilinguals who attend the monolingual schooling used equally the two features of aspect, indicating that they do not show any preference, conceivably, due to their enhanced input in Greek. Most of the participants showed prototypical choices, i.e. they used the prepositional phrase *for X time* with imperfective aspect and the prepositional phrase *in X time* with perfective aspect. The finding suggests that prototypical choices still affect bilingual participants and is in contrast with previous findings (Dosi et al. 2016b, Andreou & Tsimpli 2017); conceivably because in the previous studies the interaction between grammatical and lexical aspect did not include PP. The finding remains open for further discussion.

Home language use before the age of schooling (*home language history*) seems to predict the performance on the linguistic task but only for the bilinguals that attend a bilingual educational setting. The finding confirms the outcomes of previous studies (Cobo-Lewis et al. 2002; Oller and Eilers 2002; Dosi 2019) and verifies the findings of Gathercole (2002a; 2002b) that the role of input on the acquisition of language is important up to an age. This finding also suggests that the minority language marginalization does not improve the acquisition and development of the majority language. As previous studies also suggest (Dosi 2016; Dosi et al. 2016a; Dosi & Papadopoulou 2019), apart from counterbalanced language input, biliteracy (literacy in both languages) and bilingual schooling are of paramount importance for the emergence of the bilingual advantage.

## CONCLUSIONS

The present study investigated the production of grammatical aspect in bilingual speakers who attend bilingual, monolingual and Greek-dominant educational settings, in order to investigate the schooling effect on the development of grammatical aspect. The most important findings suggest that the majority of the bilingual speakers used the perfective over the imperfective aspect. Additionally, prototypical choices were detected in all groups. Interestingly, and confirming previous studies, home language practices, i.e. the use of Greek before the age of six, found to predict participants' performance on the Grammaticality Judgement and Sentence Correction Task, albeit only for the participants who attended a bilingual school. Summarizing, bilingual speakers who attend a monolingual educational setting do not precede in terms of their linguistic abilities in Greek. By contrast, bilingual speakers who attend a bilingual school seem to leverage factors, such as home language practices, in their later language development.

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