LEXICAL AND GRAMMATICAL ASPECT IN PAST EVENTS: TEACHING APPROACHES FOR BILINGUAL ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to exploit the outcomes of previous studies on the development of grammatical and lexical aspect in past events (in Greek) in bilingual speakers, in order to suggest appropriate teaching approaches/interventions based on their needs. Previous studies have shown that bilingual elementary students do not face issues with the morphological marking of grammatical aspect in Greek (i.e., perfective and imperfective aspect). Nonetheless, their major difficulties occur when they use aspect, while matching the lexical with the grammatical categories and, also, when pragmatic information is involved. In addition, habitual feature has found to be challenging for many bilinguals. The proposed teaching approaches suggest activities for: (a) the four language skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, writing), (b) all the three features of grammatical aspect in Greek (i.e., habitual and continuous imperfective aspect and perfective aspect) combining with temporal adverbials/connectors/conjunctions and (c) different students' proficiency levels. The present approaches leverage two input-based methods; i.e. *Input Processing* and *Focus on Form*. The proposed scenario would be useful to language teachers of Greek, who work with bilingual elementary students and want to have a practical guide for the enhancement of their students' linguistic abilities in respect to grammatical and lexical aspect.

Keywords: Bilingual development, teaching approaches, grammatical and lexical aspect, Input Processing, Focus on Form.

INTRODUCTION

Bilingualism is a complex phenomenon with great variance therein, since bilinguals have different language profiles, histories and levels of literacy. In addition, they receive different amount and quality of input (Unsworth, 2016); therefore, quite often great discrepancies are observed. Many studies have highlighted the importance of literacy for both languages (Cummins, 1976, 1979; Dosi et al., 2016a; Dosi & Papadopoulou, 2019; Andreou et al., 2020); hence if both languages receive literacy support, the "bilingual advantage" is more prominent and linguistic and cognitive benefits are observed.

Research on aspect and bilingualism has shown that aspect is a challenging feature since it lies in interfaces (Tsimpli & Sorace, 2006). In languages like Greek, aspect is divided into lexical and grammatical aspect. *Lexical aspect* refers to inherent temporal properties of a verb (Vendler 1957); while *grammatical aspect* indicates, by means of morphology, an event with respect to the perspective of the speaker (e.g. ongoing/completed) (Comrie, 1976). In Greek, grammatical aspect is divided into perfective and imperfective aspect and imperfective aspect has two interpretations, i.e., habitual and continuous. Some languages, like German, do not mark for grammatical aspect. Research on bilingual children's aspectual development

showed that they, initially, are driven by the inherent verb characteristics (i.e. lexical aspect) in order to choose the grammatical form (Rieckborn, 2006). Some studies reported that these preferences were also detected in older bilingual children (Schlyter, 2011); while other studies found that this pattern reduces once the language proficiency increases (Wilberg, 1996). Regarding the two features of grammatical aspect, perfective aspect appears earlier than imperfective aspect (Montrul 2002, 2009, Dosi 2016, 2017, Dosi et al. 2016a). As the two features of imperfective aspect concerns, controversial findings were noted; thus, in some studies habitual interpretation is acquired before continuous interpretation (Wiberg, 1996; Kihlstedt, 2002); while, in other studies the opposite finding is observed (Papadopoulou, 2005; Mattheoudakis et al., 2011; Dosi et al. 2016b). Interaction between lexical and grammatical aspect is also observed in temporo-aspectual conjunctions and connectives, since they seem to aid the accurate temporal and aspectual choice (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992, 1999; Montrul & Slabakova, 2003; Slabakova & Montrul, 2007) relations. However, the finding is not verified by all studies (Dosi et al., 2016b). In bilingualism, the attention must be also drawn to cross-linguistic influence that leads to a transfer from the more dominant language to the less dominant one (Hulk & Müller, 2000).

Latest studies have also emphasized the need of developing language learning curricula tailored to suit the needs of bilingual speakers (Gavriilidou & Mitits, 2019). Moreover, Gavriilidou (to appear) discusses how input and language learning experience affect linguistic competence of bilingual speakers and argues the necessity for the design and implementation of language learning programs that are attractive to this population. Recently, the focus of attention has also been on the crucial role of teaching intervention in bilingual development; nonetheless, studies on teaching-intervention and planning of teaching approaches for bilinguals are very scarce (Robinson & Sorace, 2018 and references therein).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bilingualism has many different aspects and great variance. Bilingual speakers differ significantly in terms of their language profiles, language histories and the literacy practices that they and their families follow (Unsworth, 2016). These differences are often affected by divergences in the quantity and quality of input (Unsworth, 2016). Literacy also has an impact on bilingual language development (Cummins, 1976, 1979). According to Cummins (1976, 1979) bilingual speakers transfer skills across languages ("interdependence theory" and "common underlying proficiency"); thus, there is an interdependence between the first (L1) and the second language (L2). This transfer is also observed in literacy skills, which are transferred from L1 to L2. In other words, *cross-linguistic influence* leads to a transfer from the more dominant language to the less dominant one (Hulk & Müller, 2000). Previous studies exhibited such findings; thus, in studies of Dosi and colleagues (Dosi 2017, Dosi et al. 2016b) (non-)heritage Greek-English bilingual children overused perfective aspect. In similar manner, in a study of Andreou & Tsimpli (2017) Greek-German bilingual children produced fewer perfective verbs compared to the Greek-English bilingual children. Continuing this line of reasoning, studies have shown that when both languages receive literacy support, the "bilingual advantage" is more obvious in both linguistic and cognitive abilities (Dosi et al., 2016a; Dosi & Papadopoulou, 2019; Andreou et al., 2020).

Previous studies on the acquisition of aspect in bilingual speakers have manifested that aspect is a challenging feature since it lies in interfaces (Tsimpli & Sorace, 2006). In some languages, similar to Greek, aspect is divided into lexical and grammatical aspect. The former denotes inherent properties of a verb (Vendler, 1957); whereas the latter signifies, via

morphophonological changes, an event regarding speaker's viewpoint (e.g. ongoing/completed) (Comrie, 1976). In Greek, grammatical aspect is divided into perfective and imperfective aspect and imperfective aspect is further subdivided into habitual and continuous interpretations. By contrast, in other languages, like German and Hungarian, grammatical aspect is not morphologically marked and aspectual differences are lexically denoted (see Sioupi 2014, for a review). Previous studies on acquisition of aspect in bilingual children depicted that, initially, inherent verb characteristics (i.e. *lexical aspect*) drive the choice of the grammatical form (see Dosi et al. 2016b, for a review). Some studies reported that the same performance in older bilingual children (Schlyter, 2011); while others suggested that this performance lessens once the language proficiency increases (Wilberg, 1996). Similarly, in a series of studies of Dosi and colleagues, vocabulary knowledge and age seem to affect the successful acquisition of aspect in older bilingual children (8-12 years old; Dosi, 2016, 2017; Dosi et al., 2016b). In respect to the two features of aspect, there seems to be a consensus among the researchers that bilinguals acquire perfective aspect before imperfective aspect (Montrul 2002, 2009, Dosi 2016, 2017, Dosi et al. 2016a). Regarding the two features of imperfective aspect, in contrast, researchers do not seem to agree. Notably, in some studies habituality seemed to be acquired before progressivity (Wiberg, 1996; Kihlstedt, 2002); while in other studies habituality is acquired after continuity (Papadopoulou, 2005; Mattheoudakis et al., 2011; Dosi et al. 2016b). Another issue that is related to the interaction between lexical and grammatical aspect are temporo-aspectual conjunctions and connectives, which seem to positively affect second language learners, because learners rely on semantic properties of the conjunctions, connectives or adverbials to express temporal (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Slabakova & Montrul, 2007) and aspectual (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992; Montrul & Slabakova, 2003) relations. However, some studies in bilinguals did not find that connectives and conjunctions lead to an accurate aspectual choice (Dosi et al., 2016b).

More recent studies on bilinguals highlighted the necessity to develop language learning curricula designed on the needs of bilingual speakers (Gavriilidou & Mitits, 2019). Gavriilidou (to appear) argues how input and language learning experience affect linguistic competence of bilingual speakers and claims that updated language learning programs and material are required. Recently, the focus of attention has also been on the vital role of teaching intervention in bilingual leaners; nonetheless, this area is under-investigated (Robinson & Sorace, 2018 and references therein).

In the last three decades, in second language teaching, efforts have been made to explore strategies that will increase students' awareness of input (VanPatten, 2002, 2004, 2015; Benati & Lee, 2008; Long, 1991, 1996). Thus, the aim is the leaners to process input further and make more successful form-meaning connections. The most well-known input-based approaches in L2 grammar teaching are *Focus on Form* (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Long, 1991; Long & Robinson, 1998) and *Input Processing* (VanPatten, 2002, 2004, 2015; Benati & Lee, 2008). Both approaches focus on meaning and teach form implicitly. *Focus on Form* refers to grammatical difficulties that persist and are systematic in the acquisition of L2 (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Long, 1991; Long & Robinson, 1998). The central focus is on meaning and the aim is to move the shift of attention from form to effective communication. Teaching intervention must not hinder macro-processing in comprehension and speech production. *Focus on Form* presupposes focus on the grammatical features, meaning and use, at once. This approach claims that micro-processing, selective attention, comparison and focus on grammatical features, can affect macro-processing, input processing, mapping, analyzing and restructuring. Hence, the form under focus has to be either oral or written

highlighted. In a similar manner, *Input Processing* (VanPatten, 2002, 2004, 2015; Benati & Lee, 2008) refers to how learners initially perceive and process linguistic data in the input that they hear or read. Similarly, this approach suggests that learners focus on meaning rather than form and teachers must change these learners' strategies. Thus, teachers provide students with structured input activities, where, the input has been altered, in order to help students abandon the inappropriate or inefficient processing strategies and make correct and appropriate form-meaning connections. Two main types of activities are used within this approach, i.e., referential and affective activities. The former type concerns activities in which there is a right or wrong answer or two options (e.g., present or past), while affective activities are those in which students express an opinion, point of view or some other "emotional" reaction and process information about the real world.

To date, although there are many teaching approaches for L2 learners, which use input-based methods for the teaching of grammatical and lexical aspect (Papadopoulou & Agathopoulou, 2014) there are no similar scenarios for bilingual elementary students. This study aims to address this gap by exploiting previous research outcomes and input-based techniques and propose appropriate teaching approaches for the improvement of grammatical and lexical aspectual abilities of bilingual elementary students.

METHODOLOGY
Participants
The proposed teaching approaches are planned for bilingual elementary students from 8-12 years old with Greek as one of their languages. Cross-linguistic differences will be also discussed. Regarding the proficiency level the proposed approaches refer to different proficiency levels and proposes differentiated activities.

Teaching goals
Two major teaching goals are set, in order to work on the improvement of: (a) discrimination between perfective and imperfective, (b) understanding the interpretations of the features of grammatical aspect in Greek (habitual imperfective, continuous imperfective and perfective) and matching these features with the appropriate adverbials/conjunctions/connectors. Activities for all language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) are proposed.

Classroom organization and material required
The students will work individually and then in pairs. The material that will be used are a computer and a projector, marker pens and answer-sheets.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

For all plans proposed the topic is "hobbies and daily activities". The two proposed approaches last 2 hours (120 minutes; 60 minutes per scenario).

The first approach aims to make the students discriminate between perfective and imperfective aspect taking into account whether the event is ongoing or finished. Firstly, listening is trained by using *Input Possessing* approach. The teacher reads 10 sentences one by one and shows pictures on the projector at the same time [e.g. *Étreksa 10 hiliómetra* / I run 10 kilometers or *Étreha 10 hiliómetra* / I was running 10 kilometers]; on the one picture the event is completed and on the other is still in process. Students listen to the sentences and on their answer-sheet they must choose the correct picture, afterwards they check their answers in pairs and they tell the answer to the teacher (Papadopoulou & Agathopoulou, 2014). For

students with lower proficiency level in Greek the sentences may be also written; though then also written skills are tested, but in the beginning, it could be a boost for the less proficient students, since they will have more time to process the sentence. For the practice of reading, *Focus on Form* and *Input Possessing* will be used; thus, the morphological marking of the verb will be highlighted [e.g. *Étre**ks**a 10 hiliómetra or Étre**h**a 10 hiliómetra*] and a referential activity will follow. The students read the text on their own and afterwards answer to 6 sentences; they mark, based on the text, whether the action is completed or not. Hence, reading comprehension is also tested. For the less dominant in Greek students, the teacher may have a simplified text, while for the more proficient students the words may be more challenging. For speaking, an affective activity may follow, where the students express their option whether they agree or disagree with the daily plan of the character of the text presented. In writing, they could write about their yesterday plan. For the less proficient students in Greek some lexical cues would help, i.e., words or phrases.

The second aim is to make the students distinguish between the different interpretations of imperfective in Greek (habitual and continuous) and at the same time revising the function of perfective aspect, albeit with the use of adverbials/conjunctions/connectors (such as *now, then, for many days, in few days, all week, suddenly, once*). At this point, lexical indicators are necessary, otherwise it is impossible to understand the interpretation of the form. For listening, similar to the previous approach, *Input Processing* method is used. Hence, the teacher reads 9 sentences (3 per condition) in a mixed order and students mark on their answer-sheet whether the sentence implies duration, occurred many times/repeatedly in the past or occurred once/instantly in the past. The first choice denotes continuity, the second habituality and the last refers to perfective aspect. The same process is followed, as described above, and with respect to differentiation, the same suggestions are proposed. For training the reading skills of the students, a multiple-choice activity can be used, where students will choose either perfective or imperfective aspect taking into account the adverbials, connectors or conjunctions used. The activity may also be a referential activity using the methodology proposed in the listening activity. For less proficient students, *Focus on Form* can be used, as well, by highlighting the adverbials, connectors or conjunctions in each sentence. Before giving the activity, the teacher may present on the projector the adverbials/ connectors/ conjunctions that indicate a different interpretation of grammatical aspect. This presentation might remain on the whiteboard for those students who feel less comfortable with these lexical cues. For speaking and writing affective activities might be used, as proposed in the previous scenario.

The teacher must remember that cross-linguistic differences may affect the choices of their students (Hulk & Müller, 2000; Dosi et al. 2016b; Dosi, 2017). Thus, teachers have to be aware of the aspectual marking in the other language and interpret whether their students' performance is influenced by these differences. If a specific error remains, then they should design a more focus lesson plan on improving the understanding and use of this issue.

A good practice for planning similar teaching approaches/interventions is to work with a specific topic. For instance, here, "hobbies and activities" was chosen and plan two versions of activities for more and less proficient students. If the teaching goal is grammar, then different vocabulary choices may differentiate the difficulty level. Finally, it is useful for the teacher to give the students an evaluation form in order to assess the parts of the implemented scenario and find the more and less successful ones. In addition, in the evaluation form, students can note the activities that found more demanding and the features that they need to

revise. Using this practice, teacher is informed about the implementation of the scenario and the needs of their students and students' awareness about their difficulties is raised.

The two proposed teaching approaches aim to improve aspectual distinctions in bilingual elementary students with Greek as one of their languages. Each teacher may implement either or both approaches based on their students' needs. More specifically, if students cannot still distinguish between perfective-imperfective and tend to rely on lexical cues (Andersen & Shirai, 1994, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig, 2005; Ayoun & Salaberry 2008; Rieckborn, 2006), then the first approach is more appropriate, since all lexical cues are omitted and the student must pay attention to morphology in order to successfully decode and interpret the event. On the other hand, if students have persistent problems with continuous or habitual interpretation (Wiberg, 1996; Kihlstedt, 2002; Papadopoulou, 2005; Mattheoudakis et al., 2011; Dosi et al. 2016b) or with the matching of grammatical aspect with the correct adverbial, connector or conjunction, then teacher should put the second scenario into practice.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study aimed to present didactic approaches regarding the teaching of aspect (in past events) in bilingual elementary students – with Greek as one of their languages – based on the findings of the latest bibliography. These approaches exploited two input-based methods (*Focus on Form* and *Input Processing*) in order to provide a more naturalist approach and to teach grammatical and lexical aspect implicitly (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Long, 1991; Long & Robinson, 1998; VanPatten, 2002, 2004, 2015). Alternatives for all for skills were given and for different proficiency levels. The proposed teaching approaches utilize the gap in literature and aspires to become useful to language teachers of Greek, who work with bilingual elementary students. Finally, it desires to influence the design and implementation of other similar teaching approaches for bilingual speakers.

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