

# Unacknowledged Negotiations: Bilingual Students Report on How They Negotiate Their Languages Within the Monolingual Primary School System in Cyprus

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## Abstract

As part of a larger study on language and identity, the chapter reports on language use among a select group of Greek/English speaking bilingual children in state elementary schools in the Republic of Cyprus. Using a participatory case study approach, multiple in-depth interviews and artifacts were collected from the children and family members. The chapter describes what these simultaneous bilingual children report about how they negotiate their languages within a school system that does not actively acknowledge their bilingualism. The findings point to what can be termed a “secret space” of linguistic negotiations beyond the purview of the classroom teacher. It is within this space that the children detail their experiences of language use, negotiation, manipulation, and translanguaging (Garcia 2009). With increased globalization and immigration throughout Europe, the findings are important for what they reveal about bilingual children’s language use and needs within monolingual school systems.

## Keywords

Bilingualism • Translanguage • Bilingual education

## Contents

Introduction .....	116
The Cypriot Educational System and Bilingual Education .....	117
Bilingual Students in a Monolingual School System .....	118
The Study .....	120
State Primary Schools in Cyprus .....	121

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115

Findings .....	122
Lack of Recognition .....	122
Keep Languages Separate .....	123
Relying on Others for Help .....	126
Parents Report Children Need Help with Greek .....	127
Rationale for the Lack of Acknowledgment .....	128
Conclusion .....	129
References .....	130

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## Introduction

Over the past 15 years and particularly since its accession into the European Union, Cyprus has seen a dramatic increase in the number of immigrants to the country. Thus, reports for 2014 indicate 13.9% of children entering state elementary school are categorized as “foreigners” (Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) Annual Report 2014, p. 447). This statistic expresses the increase in the number of children with other nationalities entering Cypriot primary schools; however, it does not indicate their linguistic backgrounds, and statistics for the numbers of children entering school speaking Greek and/or an additional language are not available. However, marriage statistics indicate that almost 40% of all marriages in Cyprus are between a Cypriot and Non-Cypriot (Department of Statistics 2013). Indicating that in addition to the number of “foreigners” entering schools, there is likely to be a growing number of dual heritage children. The children in this study are members of this group: children born in Cyprus to families where one parent is Cypriot; and the other non-Cypriot, in this case English, American, or Canadian.

Beyond their dual heritage backgrounds, the children are members of the growing group of local bilingual or multilingual speakers. The application of this label of bilingual/multilingual speakers is made with the full recognition that applying a clear classification to a child’s bilingualism is seen as inherently complex. As Baker contends, it is only through a holistic approach that we gain access to “who” a bilingual speaker is – a person who speaks two or more languages with different people, in different contexts, across a variety of domains, and for whom language proficiency varies depending on when, where, and with whom the language is used (Baker 2006, pp. 12–13). Such a definition can be applied to the children in this case as they report being raised bilingually often with a one-parent, one-language approach. Additionally, they possess “multi-competences” (Baker 2006); use their languages in varying domains and with varying frequency therefore demonstrating a “complementary principle” (Grosjean 2004, p. 34); and exhibit language use and acquisition across varying domains, people, and purposes as different areas of their lives require different languages (Grosjean 1997, p. 165).

In applying a label of bilingual to the children, it is important to understanding the type of bilingual language use a child experiences. As such, the label of simultaneous bilinguals was applied to the participants who are all raised in homes where they use both Greek and English most often through a one-parent, one-language approach. The term simultaneous as applied to this group does not, however, assume

a similar dominant language within the group. Therefore, there may have been children within the cohort for whom Greek was more dominant than English and vice versa. Thus, this group of bilingual/multilingual dual heritage children is distinct from the large number of Greek Language Learners (GLL), who have been entering Cypriot schools because of increased migration.

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## The Cypriot Educational System and Bilingual Education

State schools in Cyprus are monolingual Greek language institutions, which focus on the development of Standard Modern Greek even while the vernacular in Cyprus is the Greek Cypriot Dialect. The schools' approach to bilingual education is one which is focused "*On the rapid and smooth induction of non-native speaking pupils to the school system and the Cypriot society*" (MoEC Annual Report 2014, p. 447) and this is achieved through "mainstreaming." Mainstreaming or submersion bilingual education programs as defined by Baker (2006, p. 215) are usually assimilation or subtractive programs where the language minority child is submerged in the majority language classroom with the eventual outcome being monolingualism in the target language. The Annual Report outlines its approach as one in where "*Non-native speaking pupils participate in classes along with the native Greek-speaking pupils.*" and which "*Involves placing non-native speaking pupils in a separate class for a specific number of teaching periods per week. These separate classes focus on intensive learning of Greek and offer specialized assistance according to the pupils' specific needs. The Adult Education Centers offer afternoon classes in Greek as a second language to the children of repatriated ethnic Greeks, but also to all other non-native speaking pupils interested in this subject*" (MoEC Annual Report 2014, p. 447). As such, bilingual education is primarily focused on the teaching of Greek as an additional language to new immigrant children with the ultimate goal of assimilation within the society. There does not currently appear to be a focus on issues of heritage language maintenance or the specific linguistic profiles of Greek-speaking children who enter the school as bilingual speakers, such as the children in this study.

This view of Greek Language Learners as immigrants, which is evident in the material from the MoEC, may be influenced by the historical definition of bilingual used by the MoEC which in the past applied the use of the word "other language speakers" – διγλωσσία (diglossia) as a term to define children who held another nationality (MoEC Annual Report 2005). The official translation of this to "other language speakers" (MoEC Annual Report 2005) and the use of current "non-native speaking" (MoEC Annual Report 2014) rather than a more direct translation of two-language or bilingual speaker can be viewed as analogous to one outlined in France by Helot and Young (2002, 2005). Helot and Young claim that the term bilingual was not used to refer to immigrant speakers of other languages as it contains positive connotations reserved for the acquisition of languages in mainstream European programs (2002, p. 97). As such in Cyprus, children entering the school system are not actively evaluated for their linguistic backgrounds and are instead seen to be members of a group of speakers on the primary basis of their

national identity. The children in this study who are born in Cyprus would therefore enter the school system with the identification of Cypriot regardless of their linguistic backgrounds.

This lack of recognition of bilingual children entering monolingual school systems is not unique to Cyprus and is in fact reflected in the general policy and literature on bilingualism where the group is often unseen. Jorgensen and Quist (2009) explain this lack of representation of bilinguals as part of the disjunction between the many supranational initiatives (such as The European Community Commission directive 77/486) advocating minority language support at school and a sense of “national romanticism” which results in a lack of implementation at the local level. They contend that this disjunction leads to minority language students experiencing a sense of marginalization at school (Jorgensen and Quist 2009, p. 168).

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## **Bilingual Students in a Monolingual School System**

A consequence of this disjunction is that much of what we understand about the experiences and learning needs of bilingual students who enter monolingual school systems has been extrapolated from literature on bilingual or LEP (Limited English Proficiency) students. Walter, for instance, reminds us that the majority of children will enter school with an identifiable language (2010, p. 135) and that it is therefore reasonable to expect that most bilingual children enter school with some language competence in the Language of Instruction alongside their other language(s). However, these competences may be limited and consequently may affect their learning experience at school (Walter 2010). Baker (2006) refers to differences in experiences in terms of language use and ability, making the case that there is a distinction between the ability to speak two languages and a life where speaking two languages is part of your lived experience. Grosjean (2010) argues for newer understandings of the bilingual which will not simply explore levels of fluency but also domains and frequency of use (2010, p. 24), particularly because the bilingual’s language use will be influenced by the “complementary principle” where different language will be used in accordance to need in differing domains (Grosjean 2004, p. 34).

Thomas and Collier (1997) explored these competences when they reviewed the success of LEP students across a series of school districts and within a variety of bilingual education programs. They concluded that a large percentage of these children did not achieve academic success on par with their monolingual peers and scored in the lowest levels for academic achievement. Thomas and Collier refer to the disjuncture between these students’ language abilities, and school tasks and assignments which results in underachievement as the “language effect.” Though focused on bilingual programs, they also examined the academic achievement of LEP students who were entered into structured immersion or submersion programs – essentially monolingual schooling: the results showed these students’ academic achievement levels suffered. Likewise Walter concludes that the failure rates of LEP students enrolled in a variety of bilingual education programs shows a strong

relationship between lower levels of academic achievement in LEP students with fewer years of L1 support (2010, p. 137). Ultimately, Thomas and Collier (1997) determined the only groups to achieve on par with their monolingual peers were in dual language programs. Though different in its settings, it is possible to infer from Thomas and Collier's work that much like LEP students entering structured immersion or submersion programs, a bilingual child entering a monolingual school system may demonstrate a disjunction between knowledge of the language of instruction and academic achievement. This is particularly applicable if we understand bilingual language development from a perspective where bilinguals experience varying abilities in their languages across language domains and are not simply two monolinguals in one body. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that for at least some bilingual children entering monolingual schools without learning support, there may be a "language effect."

The possibility of a "language effect" for this group of bilingual/multilingual students entering monolingual school systems is also consistent with Skutnabb-Kangas and Tourkoma (1976) and Cummins (1979, 2000) who reported associations between school success and language support in the first language. Cummins' (1979) controversial BICS-CALP, "basic interpersonal communication skills" versus "cognitive-academic language proficiency," distinction or "the threshold effect" contended that academic success in the target language would depend on the level of bilingual development. Cummins (1979, 2000) explained there is an important distinction between a student's conversational proficiency in a language and academic proficiency, with the latter being a greater determinant of school success. Cummins hypothesized that English Language Learners could display relative competency in conversational English, yet not have the academic competency to compete with native speakers of English. He based this argument in part on the concept of language fluency existing on a continuum, much in the same way bilingualism does, and as a result, academic language may be less developed for some language learners. He believed that such learners might need up to 5 years to "catch up" with their monolingual target language speaking peers. Cummins (2000) contention was that children who had limited proficiency were more likely to suffer academically than those who held either partial or proficient levels of the language of instruction, particularly if they did not receive additional support during the crucial 5-year period.

Though highly controversial and directed at English Language Learners (ELL), Cummins' theory has relevance for students who enter a monolingual school as bilingual. If these students possess their language on a continuum, which is related to context and use, then although they may speak and understand both languages, it is possible that they have limited literacy skills in one language or experience one language as more dominant than the other. Should this be the case, then for the student whose language of instruction is the less dominant language, there could be an unforeseen effect on their academic success, particularly if they entered school and did not receive additional linguistic support. The controversial "threshold hypothesis" that there are threshold levels of linguistic competencies which must be reached for a child to attain cognitive and academic advantages from being

bilingual (Cummins 1979) is also valuable in helping us to understand individual academic journeys. This is because it accommodates for the idea that bilingual children are not likely to be “balanced” or “equal” language users and as such ensures an acknowledgement of variance in the linguistic profiles of bilingual children and the interplay of this variance with educational success.

A second issue, which may very likely affect the academic achievement of the bilingual child entering a monolingual school system, is connected to what we understand about how children store language. Studies have shown that the manner in which bilingual children store and recall information and the role of language in their memory differs from how monolinguals use and recall language (Baker 2006; Bhatia and Ritchie 2004; Meisel 2004; Haritos 2002, 2003, 2004; Grosjean 1982). If bilinguals differ in their cognitive abilities, learning styles, and needs, then there is no reason to believe they may not need additional support to develop their academic linguistic skills in the language of instruction. This acknowledgement of two linguistic codes working in tandem but not necessarily equally is discussed by Garcia (2009) within the concept of “dynamic bilingualism” and “translanguaging” in bilinguals. She posits the idea that the bilingual child draws on all her cognitive abilities while using a language, never shutting off one language or the other so the two languages are in consistent interaction like the wheels on an all-terrain vehicle. As such, it would seem prudent for educators to consider these differences in the development of academic language profiles when working with bilingual children entering a monolingual school system. However, more often than not, these children and the manner in which their languages interact and influence their learning are overlooked by the school system in favor of viewing them solely as monolingual target language speakers.

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## The Study

As part of a larger study on language and identity, multiple in-depth interviews were conducted with eight children – five girls and three boys ages of 10 through 12 at the time of the study, – and their parents over a 17-month period. The children were all Greek-/English-speaking bilinguals who attended monolingual Greek state primary schools in Cyprus. All the children have one parent who is a Greek Cypriot national and another who is a national from an English-speaking country – America, Canada, or The United Kingdom. All the children were born in Cyprus. The children of repatriated Cypriots were not included in the study. The families were identified through social network snowballing (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 28), where contact with one participant often led to the recommendation of another. The families of the children were all permanently resident in Cyprus with the non-Cypriot parents having from eight to over 25 years of residency in the country.

Noteworthy in its difference from many other studies of bilinguals in Cyprus was that the participating families would be characterized as “middle class” and enjoyed the varying degrees of social and financial mobility that one would associate with the middle class (Apple 2000); as such none of the children would have been classified as

coming from an economically disadvantaged home. The families could be characterized as both professional and semiprofessional; parents were teachers, bankers, business people, accountants, mechanics, and administrative assistants. Importantly, the fact that the participating children were from the middle class was not a selective feature of the study but a by-product of the linguistic parameters of selecting Greek/English speakers. A result of this socioeconomic status was the group could be viewed as having more *habitus* (Bourdieu 1994) and could be presumed to be more agile at navigating, operating, interpreting, and using the educational system to their own benefit. However, within this concept of *habitus*, it is equally vital to recognize the outsider status of the non-Cypriot and non-Greek-speaking parent for whom this navigation was often more challenging due to issues of culture and language.

In order to provide a depth of data and context for the study, a variety of methods for data collection were used. First to map language use patterns of participants and to establish a bilingual language use, Language Use Charts (Baker 2006) were completed by all children and their parents. Once this was completed, the main data gathering method was the use of multiple in-depth interviews (Alderson 2008; Mayall 2000) conducted with all children and on separate occasions with their parents. Multiple in-depth interviews allowed for a “teasing out” of issues so that the participants were able to talk about themselves and their lived experience (Athinas 2002 in Scourfield et al. 2006, p. 28). Additionally, by employing a responsive interviewing model, the interview process became an interpretive one in which the interviewer and interviewee developed a relationship throughout the interview process and where the goal of the process was depth not breadth in providing understanding (Rubin and Rubin 2005, p. 30). Interview data have been characterized as inseparable from location, manner, and person(s) (Holstein and Gubrium 1995) consequently; three interviews were conducted with each child. Interviews followed a good practice approach (O’Kane 2000, p. 150) where the interview was allowed to flow into conversation as much as possible (Kvale 1996, p. 42). Children had the choice over the location and length of the interview; additionally they could choose to be interviewed alone or in the presence of a parent or friend. Initial interview questions stemmed directly from the information collected from the Language Use Charts (Baker 2006) and later questions were developed as loosely structured main questions that could be reworded and explained as needed and which were then funneled into probes (Rubin and Rubin 2005). Children were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Additionally, accommodations were made to follow good practice and ethical researching methods with children (Christensen and Prout 2002; Alderson 2001). Finally, following the mixed method or mosaic approach, (Clark and Moss 2001) artifacts of the child’s choice were collected.

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## State Primary Schools in Cyprus

Noteworthy to the study was that the children interviewed for the study did not attend the same school. However, all the schools were located within the Nicosia district or the growing suburb areas surrounding Nicosia. The variety of schools



attended meant that with a couple of exceptions school was not a unified physical context. This was important because although there is a growing base of research regarding the experience of non-Cypriot children in state schools in Cyprus, (Theodorou 2010; Zembylas 2010a, b; Trimikliniotis and Demetriou 2009). much of the research has tended to focus on either the perspectives of teachers (Papamichael 2008), Greek and/or Turkish Cypriot students' perspectives, Greek Cypriot and immigrant children's perspectives of each other (Spyrou 2001; Zembylas 2010a, b) or general attitudes towards racism (Trimikliniotis 2004; Theodorou 2010). Thus including children from a variety of schools provided a broader realm of experiences even within a small sample. Additionally it can be claimed that the children in this study represent are an under-researched group in the Cypriot context.

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## Findings

The study revealed interesting insight about how this group of bilingual children managed and negotiated their languages within a monolingual school setting. The children and parents reported on their use of language at school and on whether or not they were identified as bilingual speakers within the school system or by individual classroom teachers. Additionally they reported on how they coped with their languages at school particularly within their monolingual classrooms, and finally, they addressed the issue of whether or not they received any additional linguistic support or felt they needed such support from the school. Each of these areas is addressed in the following sections.

## Lack of Recognition

Throughout the interviews, the children described that to their knowledge there was no formal recognition of their bilingualism by the school or the MoEC. They, however, did report that individual teachers knew they were bilinguals. This is typified in the excerpt below with Panos aged 11 at the time. Panos has a Greek-speaking father and English-speaking mother. His parents reported they had provided him with Greek language support outside of school through a private teacher.

I: *Um, do your teachers know you speak Greek and English?*

P: *Yeah.*

I: *Yeah, all your teachers that you've had?*

P: *Yeah.*

I: *Yeah so do you ever use English in class? Ever?*

P: *No.*

Panos like the other children reported that to his knowledge all his teachers knew he was a bilingual speaker, but that even with this knowledge he had never used English within the classroom setting. Teachers' and school's knowledge of the



children's bilingualism was also confirmed through parental interviews. However, this knowledge was characterized as casual and neither the children nor the parents described any formal process of recognition of the children's bilingualism by the school. Parents for example reported no discussions with teachers or the school about their children's bilingualism or any possible influence it might have on managing classwork, homework, or cultural concerns.

Why the families and the children reported no formal recognition of the children's bilingualism is interesting particularly as previous studies of Cypriot teachers' attitudes towards immigrant children and their families cite teachers' perceptions of a lack of the parents' integration and interest in school as a reason for poor pupil progress and communication (Theodorou 2010). However, these families had reported high levels of integration and contact with the schools. In fact, of the seven families involved in the study, six had previously been actively involved in the Parent Teachers' Associations of their respective schools. Consequently, the families did not present as either uninvolved or disenfranchised from the school community and certainly would have been available for discussions about their children's bilingualism. However, based on the reporting of the children and parents there was no active acknowledgement of the bilingual status of the children or of any learning needs that might be associated with this bilingualism by either individual teachers or the school system through the MoEC, consequently the children were treated within the classroom periods as all other monolingual students.

## Keep Languages Separate

The lack of acknowledgement of the children's linguistic background is further reinforced by what the children reported about how their languages functioned within the classroom. In further discussion about language use at school, the children reported a clear separation of languages within the school classroom. This is illustrated later on in the interview with Panos, where he explained what he understood about language at school. Panos had reported that he used Greek and English every day, when questioned about the domains he responded as below:

I: *Ya, when do you use Greek and when do you use English?*

P: *When I go to school I use Greek, and when I come home when I talk to my mom I speak English.*

Panos' reporting of a separation in linguistic domains is not an unusual finding as the children were enrolled in a monolingual school system. Of interest is what the children reported about *how* they used and understood this language use at school. Christos characterizes this in the exchange below; Christos has a Greek-speaking father and English-speaking mother and was in the fifth grade at the time. His mother reported that he received considerable academic support from both his father and his Greek-speaking grandparents who helped with homework on a daily basis. I asked him about incidents at school where he might remember information in English not

Greek, so I specifically referenced other classes – not English class, where we had already established he spoke in English.

I: *Ah, what about when you're at school and you're like doing lessons like maybe you're doing επιστήμη (Science) or ιστορία (History) γεωγραφία (Geography) one of these lessons like this? Do you ever have a time where sometimes, you know, you are going to answer, like the teacher asked a question, do you ever have a time where you get the answer in English instead of in Greek?*

C: *NO. (Emphatic)*

I: *No?*

C: *I only speak in Greek and answer. Only in English class, I speak and answer in English.*

I: *Have you ever had a time where you answered the teacher's question and the words came out in English?*

C: *No.*

I: *No, have you ever had a time where you knew the answer, but you knew it in English, and you put your hand up or you had to wait before you could answer [Yeah] so that you could change it from English into Greek?*

C: *Yeah.*

I: *You've had a time, can you tell me about that time?*

C: *Uh, like my teacher asked me something and I, cause my mom speaks to me here in English, I thought about it, and cause my mom had told me that before and I thought about it but then I answered in Greek.*

I: *So what happens to you when you're at school and you know the answer in English let's say you know, but not in Greek, what happens, what do you do?*

C: *I still think of it in English, but I just say it in Greek, **I don't have no problem** [my emphasis here].*

Revealing in this exchange with Christos was not his admission of moving from one language to the other a movement that would be characteristic of a bilingual speaker, but rather, how emphatic he was about not making the mistake of using English in what he presumably understood as an inappropriate domain. When initially questioned about his language use, he was adamant that he never used English outside of English class, he always answered in Greek. His insistence on this was as if an admission of mixing the languages would be equated with not “managing” his bilingualism properly indicating perhaps that he would be perceived as less than an “idealized native speaker” (Leung et al. 1997).

Christos stated that he was in possession of information that he had learnt in English, but he waited until he had figured out how to say it all in Greek before answering – risking perhaps the chance to participate within the lesson. As he was enrolled in a monolingual school, it would be expected that he answered in Greek, and as a bilingual, he would be aware of domain specific use of language (Grosjean 1982). However, his last sentence, “I don't have no problem” is of interest. It is possible that he uses the phrase to indicate that the movement between and through languages is not difficult for him that he manages without any problems. Alternatively, his response may have reflected that he acquainted an inability to manage as a weakness and his firm response was designed to show that he does not “suffer” this weakness. What is curious is that rather than explaining himself by saying, for

example, “I do it all the time” or “It is easy for me,” he referred to it as not being a problem, indicating that there may be a negativity connected to not being able to keep languages separate.

The importance of managing languages in this uncomplicated straightforward manner where there are no “problems” was also discussed by Stella. Stella had a Greek-speaking father and an English-speaking mother and was 11 at the time. Stella had been asked about how she “managed” her two languages at school her answer is recounted in the passage, which follows:

I: *It's the same, yeah and in terms of classes and using English and using Greek how do you find that? I mean have you needed help at school, like with your Greek or anything like that, or do you manage on your own, or... ?*

S: *Um, I never need help like I'm fine, English and Greek, and um that's all like it's easy for me to know Greek and English, cause when I grow up I want to be an actor and it's going to be easy, like I want to start to use to use fame.*

I: *OK and what about like, like you know does it make school for you? Does it play any part?*

[Conversation interrupted as someone enters the home]

I: *In school for you, does it; is it important or not important?*

S: *Um, it's uh, very important for me to know the two languages, but like it's easy. I **don't have any problem** [my emphasis]*

Similar to Christos, Stella recounts this idea of separation of her languages in the classroom. She is clear that there are advantages to knowing two languages; in fact, she has even connected her bilingualism to her future success – to become a world famous actress. However, the insistence that she clearly and without problem manages the two languages is curious. Like Christos, it is as if an acknowledgement of any struggle could be equated with a weakness. These responses were typical of those reported by the children. There was emphasis on the separation of languages particularly within the classroom and an affirmation that the children managed this separation in a straightforward uncomplicated manner.

It is in this emphatic denial of any struggle to remain on code that reveals information on language use at school. It would be expected that as bilinguals the children would move even unconsciously back and forth between their languages – particularly as we understand the complexity involved in translanguaging in bilinguals (Creese and Blackledge 2010; Garcia 2009) and indeed additional accounts of their language use demonstrate this. However, the children are reluctant to acknowledge this movement and are instead focused on the ideas of separation of their languages.

This focus reveals an understanding that those bilinguals who manage their languages without interference are “performing” in an “acceptable manner”, while those who demonstrate a struggle to keep the languages separate are perhaps perceived as “problematic”. This understanding of language use at school may be influenced by the manner in which the school system responds to other language speakers. The MoEC’s decision to focus on the mainstreaming of non-Greek speakers means that there is only one type of bilingual child acknowledged within

the school system of the Greek Language Learner. Unfortunately, this Greek Language Learner is also synonymous in the Cypriot context with the immigrant child, child who within this context is additionally stereotyped and who often faces limited social acceptance and mobility (Trimikliniotis 2004). Consequently, simultaneous Greek-/English-speaking bilingual children within the school system may feel an unspoken pressure to emphasize their ability to “manage” their bilingualism in an uncomplicated manner, as a means of avoiding the negative association with the immigrant children who are more marginalized group.

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## Relying on Others for Help

In contradiction to what the children reported about managing their languages in an uncomplicated straightforward manner, the children also reported incidents, which indicated they often sought help with their Greek at school in a nonformal manner. An example of this is illustrated in the extract below here. Panos recounted how he used a variety of tactics to manage his language in the classroom.

*I: Do you ever find yourself like when you're in class do you ever have times where you have trouble thinking in Greek?*

*P: Ya.*

*I: Ya, what's that like? What happens when you have...?*

*P: Sometimes I can't think of a word in Greek and I think of it in English [Uh huh] and sometimes the other way round.*

*I: OK and when that happens to you at school and you think of the word in English what do you do?*

*P: I, I think and then if I don't know sometimes if my friends know I ask them.*

*I: You ask your friends what's this word?*

*P: Ya.*

*I: Ya and will they, do they know enough English that they can help you?*

*P: Sometimes, yes.*

*I: Do you ever ask the teacher? Do you ever say to the teacher, Kyria (Mrs.) I can't think of the word in....*

*P: Hardly.*

Here Panos reported on how he used a variety of tactics including relying on friends as he moved into and out of his languages in a translanguaging moment. Of interest was the acknowledgement that he did not rely on his teacher for help. Indeed his negotiations for help took place beyond the purview of the teacher in a “secret space”. Maria recorded an additional example of this reliance on others for help in the extract below; she was the only child who employed relying on her teacher for help.

*I: OK ah let me just think, what happens at school let's say you're doing like ιστορία (history) or επιστήμη (science) you know one of those classes, ah, and have you ever had a time where the teacher asked a question and you knew the answer but it came first in English? Do you ever have times where you're like trying to get the words?*

*M: Yeah, kind of, yeah.*

I: *What do you do when you have times like that?*

M: *Well, I try to use help from the kids that know English too and sometimes it's kind of I don't really get it right, but my teacher understands it, but mostly I think I know the words but some of them cause they are kind of hard and I can't pronounce them right, I just use my mind.*

Maria described an acknowledgment of struggle and of moving between languages. She reported working to use all of the resources available to her in such situations – relying on friends and on the teacher understanding a response, which may be less than perfect. For Maria things were not straightforward and she did not infer that she had “no problem”; she recognized that sometimes it was “hard” and she had to “use her mind”. She also acknowledged that there were parts of her Greek language expression that she struggled with – not knowing the words or how to pronounce something – and that this resulted in a struggle for her. A situation more in line with what the literature on bilingualism where language use takes place in a complicated and varied manner influenced by place and incident.

What emerged from the data was that there appeared to be an issue with expressing a need for help to teachers, which revealed vulnerability. The conversations with the children regarding language at school demonstrated how little they directly relied on their teachers for academic support connected to linguistic matters. In addition to fears of association with marginalized groups, this vulnerability may have been influenced by issues of exposure to teachers' evaluation and power on two levels. The first in the acknowledgment that there is something that is not understood and the need for academic support or help and the second that this lack of understanding stems from the teacher may interpret as a linguistic “deficit.” Both possibilities are unsettling in what they reveal about children's confidence in exposure with their teachers in Cyprus.

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## Parents Report Children Need Help with Greek

Adding to the issues of Greek at school was that during the parental interviews when fluency issues in Greek were discussed, several of the parents interviewed expressed that they currently or had previously felt that their child could have benefited from additional academic support with the Greek language. As one father put it;

*“I think the school they don't care if a child is a bilingual child, they don't care. They keep seeing all the kids as Greek Cypriots, Greek speaking and they don't treat them differently. I mean this is what I see. But what I notice with both my children, both my children have problems with Greek language. Um, dictionary? (ορθογραφία? – spelling?) [Literally dictation, a common teaching method in many primary schools] Spelling yeah, and ways to express themselves freely in Greek, they express themselves easy in English, more easy (um hum) um.”* (Second interview with Panos' father)

However, perhaps due to both the socioeconomic position of the families as middle-class and the frequent inability of the non-Greek-speaking parent to help

significantly with homework, families had often turned to outside help by paying for private teachers rather than address the issue with the school or classroom teacher. This may have been because although they expressed that they thought the children should be doing better, none of the children were failing, or had been identified by the school, as not managing in Greek and again any intervention program would take place within the “stigmatized” range of programs for immigrant children.

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## **Rationale for the Lack of Acknowledgment**

The rigidity of language use at school which the children reported contradicts the research on bilingual language use which demonstrates that languages, though certainly domain specific, are held on a continuum and as such some language mixing, code switching, or translanguaging should be expected of the bilingual learner. Indeed what is of importance here is not establishing whether these linguistic experiences are the norm for bilinguals but the manner in which the children reported what the literature tells us is a normal occurrence for bilinguals.

The children did not report any active recognition by teachers or the school for any role of their bilingualism in the classroom with the result that they were left to work things out on their own in a “secret space” beyond the access of the teacher. Certainly this reveals a complex picture of the children’s bilingualism within the school context and indicates that there are issues which need addressing in terms of academic achievement, parent and teacher understandings of bilingualism, and the use of both languages within the school setting.

It is important to emphasize that these findings should not be used to indicate that all simultaneous bilingual children would need additional linguistic support. However, in this particular context there is evidence to inspire further investigation. Particularly as Baker advocates for us to view the bilingual as “holistic” (2006, p. 12). Thus, these simultaneous bilingual children would not necessarily be expected to maintain competency levels in Greek exactly on par with English or vice versa (Baker 2006).

As such, if a child reserves the use of Greek primarily for school and spends the rest of her day interacting with her mother in English, the linguistic division would closely mirror the experiences of a GLL and as such, it would not be unreasonable to expect to see similar language development. This separation, added to what the children and families have previously reported about struggles with language, are indications that Cummins’ (1979) concept of a divide between BICS-CALP could be an issue, particularly, as the children’s communicative skills in Greek do not necessarily reflect their academic achievements in the language. Primarily there is evidence to suggest further research into this area to establish whether such children could benefit from extra linguistic support.

Also of concern to how the children experience Greek at school is the question of why teachers who know a child is bilingual are reported as nonresponsive to this bilingualism. Particularly when parents report that children could have benefited from additional academic support with Greek. It is unlikely that parents would

acknowledge their children struggling with language issues – even to the extent of paying for private tuition outside of school – while teachers remained unaware of any linguistic issues in the same children.

This lack of acknowledgement suggests a series of possibilities. First, teachers may not recognize the role of the children's bilingualism in their language development because this group is not documented as bilingual. Having been born in Cyprus, the children are registered as local students. Additionally, the group of children do not fit the stereotypical mould of a bilingual child portrayed by the MoEC as synonymous with immigrant. Consequently teachers may place this group of children within the larger category of Greek speakers thereby removing the possibility of the children's bilingualism influencing school performance.

This placement of the children within the category of Greek speakers may also be subject to the popular misconception that simultaneous bilinguals should be balanced (Meisel 2004) and simply double monolinguals (Garcia 2009; Genesee 2004), holding each language equally. A concept, which though it is elusive and deceptive within the literature (Baker 2006) is still very much present in how bilinguals are understood. If languages are equal and separate, then there may be an expectation that once a child enters school, she simply and uncomplicatedly “switches over into Greek”.

Finally, there is an economic and social issue at work as well. In the case of these children, teachers will recognize the “habitus” the parents occupy having social, economic, and community standing as middle class and well educated. This “status” may influence teachers to displace academic support onto the home by extending an expectation of intervention on the part of the parents. As a result, if the parents do not raise concerns over their child's language learning and the child is viewed by the teacher as “managing,” then it is unlikely academic language concerns will be addressed.

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## Conclusion

The current synonymous use of bilingual for immigrant student has resulted in this group of “home-grown bilinguals” being completely overlooked within current educational policy in Cyprus. Consequently, support for bilingual students provided by the MoEC focuses on identifying students who are essentially Greek Language Learners. As a result, learning needs of simultaneous bilingual children are only acknowledged in an ad hoc manner and children are left to negotiate and manipulate their languages on their own and beyond the purview of the classroom teacher in their own “secret spaces”.

It appears that the main reason for this lack of recognition is due to the consistent negative connection of bilingual with immigrant. This group is overlooked because they are middle class, English speakers with educated parents, and in Cyprus, bilingual is associated with negative stereotyping of immigrant groups. Consequently bilingual children are seen to be of low socioeconomic standing, with parents characterized as disinterested, have different religions and manners of dress, and lack a command of Greek language (Panayiotopoulos and Nicolaidou



2007, p. 74). As the children in this study are born in Cyprus, considered to be from “good families” with Greek names and with parents who are actively involved in the school community that they are not ascribed the label of bilingual are seen as Greek-speakers and ignored.

Defining the children as solely Greek speaking means there is a continued implicit denial of their bilingualism. In so doing, the MoEC fails to recognize this group as a deserving community which has and needs considerations of justice. Indeed one interpretation of this lack of recognition by the MoEC is that it constitutes a covert policy (Corson 1999) in which the educational system in an effort to ensure the assimilation of all children as wholly and exclusively Greek-Cypriots ignores their differences, thereby furthering the goal of producing good Greek-speaking Cypriot citizens for society.

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