Two Early Immersion Classes in Colombia: The Role of Reformulation in Bilingual Storytelling

ANNE-MARIE DE MEJÍA
Formerly at Universidad del Valle, CAI, California

ABSTRACT

In this article, I will discuss the role of reformulation in bilingual classroom storytelling in two early immersion programmes in Colombia. My discussion will be based on an ethnographic study of bilingual classroom interaction, where the languages used were English and Colombian Spanish.

I will first examine the development of the notion of reformulation in the area of discourse studies and code-switching. I will then present a brief overview of the school context in which I carried out my data collection, with particular reference to social and institutional aspects, such as the type of educational provision available, the teaching materials used and details of classroom organization. I will also include information on the background of the participants, teachers, parents and children, as well as details of teacher perceptions on their classroom language use.

I will go on to examine characteristics of bilingual classroom storytelling, as revealed in my audio-recorded data from six selected events, focusing specifically on how the two teachers in the study used interlingual reformulation as a facilitative pedagogic strategy in their storytelling. I will argue that differences of teaching style and manner of story presentation may account for variations in the two teachers' use of reformulation in their teaching.

Introduction

In the extensive literature on immersion research, many of the studies carried out during the 1970s and 1980s focused on the development of the learners' L2 proficiency, noting that there was no evidence of harmful effects on the development of either the L1 or academic achievement for students in immersion programmes (see Heller, 1990, for a review of immersion research results). One of the accepted tenets of language use in this highly successful educational innovation has been the perceived need for a policy of language separation in the classroom, or, in the words of Merrill Swain (1983), a policy of 'Bilingualism through Monolingualism'.

Although Swain's position was based on the results of a study carried out by Legarretta-Mercaida in bilingual programmes involving concurrent and separation approaches, since then there has been very little work which has focused specifically on L1 and L2 language use in immersion classrooms, which might provide evidence to support or question this stand. The aim of this article is, first and foremost, to examine one particular discourse strategy – reformulation in classroom storytelling – focusing primarily on the code-switching practices which characterize the pedagogic repertoires of two classroom practitioners working in bilingual contexts. I will argue that this interactional phenemenon may be seen as a facilitative strategy – helping to provide young children in the initial stages of becoming bilingual with access to learning opportunities, created through classroom storytelling activities.

The data I draw on here are taken from a wider ethnographic study of bilingual classroom interaction in two early partial-immersion programmes in Colombia. This project was carried out over a period of five years, and was based in two English–Spanish bilingual schools catering for upper-middle class pupils in Cali, the third largest city in the south-west of the country.

In the following sections I will first briefly situate my discussion of reformulation by briefly reviewing ways in which this concept has been developed in the area of discourse analysis and in studies of code-switching. I will then go on to provide details of the context of situation in which the classroom data were gathered.

Reformulation in Bilingual Discourse

Both Gumperz (1982) and Auer (1984) refer to this feature of conversational discourse, in different ways. Gumperz uses the term 'reiteration' to include both repetition and paraphrase, while Auer coins the term 'pseudo-translation' to refer to turn components that 'repeat' what has previously been said in the other language. This 'repetition' does not annul the first version, as in self-repair (Schlegloff, Jefferson and Sacks, 1977), but paraphrases it. Following Gumperz (1982), Auer lists the main functions of this type of repetition as specification, elaboration and summary.

Py (1986), on the other hand, in his work in French–speaking Switzerland, develops the idea of reformulation as repair in exolingual conversation. This type of interaction has been characterized by Nussbaum (1991) as interaction in which there is a wide gap between the repertoires of the participants, leading to asymmetrical or unequal exchanges. Py sees reformulation as a means of modifying a message which has already been given, which may be accomplished either intra- or interlingually. Reform-ulation is thus seen as a means of constituting a new base, on which conversation is able to reorient itself. In this way, it serves as a facilitative strategy, enabling the participants to continue interacting on the basis of renegotiated understanding.

In Catalonia, Nussbaum (1990) and Cambra Giné (1991), following Py (1986), have examined the use of reformulation as a facilitative, pedagogic strategy in a multilingual, foreign-language classroom context. Cambra Giné distinguishes between interlingual and intralingual reformulation. In the first category she includes both literal translations which are juxtaposed with their original utterances, but which are linguistically unmarked, and those translations in which the relationship of equivalence between the two utter-ances is explicitly signalled. She sees reformulation used by the teacher both as a preventative and as a reactive strategy. In other words, reformulation can be used by the teacher to avoid difficulties in pupils' understanding or use of the foreign language. The teacher may also use interlingual reformulations to react to a request for help from a pupil, which may be verbalized or may be signalled by a gesture, or in another non-verbal manner.

I have found the contributions of the Swiss and Catalan linguists particu-larly helpful in my study. The distinction between interlingual and intralingual reformulation has enabled me to examine the phenomenon as a characteristic of the bilingual classroom discourse in my data, while preserving a link with work being carried out in the area of discourse studies

in general (see Blakemore, 1993, 1994; Culpepper, 1994). Furthermore, the concepts of repetition and paraphrase noted in the work of Gumperz and Auer (above), have been influential in channelling my observations regarding the teachers' use of direct translation equivalents in contrast to paraphrasing, both through single utterances and also by means of more complex reiteration.

The social and institutional context of the study

In this section I will discuss aspects of the social and institutional context in which the study was carried out, in order to situate appropriately the subsequent discussion of the bilingual data.

Over the last twenty years, there has a noticeable change in Colombia's international relations. Conscious of the increasing globalization of the world economy, the Colombian government has instituted a policy of opening up the Colombian market to international trade (*la Apertura Económica*). This has led to a revaluation of the importance of foreign languages in general within the country, and of English in particular, as a means of interchanging academic and business advances at both national and international level. Thus, bilingual education (especially in English and Spanish) has been seen as a key educational alternative for parents who want their children to be successful in the third millennium.

An increasing number of private bilingual schools of the immersion type are being set up throughout Colombia to cater mainly for middle- and upper-middle-class children. Many parents are anxious to send their children to these institutions, as they often have their sights set on further education opportunities in the United States or Europe. Such schools are characterized by bilingual curricula, in which the two languages used as media of instruction are kept separate across different subject areas. Thus, maths, biology, chemistry and economics are typically taught in the foreign language, while lessons in religious education, social studies and physical education are conducted in the first language.

Both immersion schools selected for my study are located in the same upper-middle-class residential neighbourhood on the outskirts of Cali, one of the three largest cities in Colombia. They are prestigious, private establishments, with a reputation for high academic achievement and ample facilities, such as well-stocked libraries with books in English and Spanish,

gymnasiums and auditoriums. They cater for a mainly upper–middle–class population.

The two classes selected for study, one from each institution, were similar in that both were school entry groups, consisting of twenty to twenty-five children between the ages of 4 and 5. The majority of them came from mono-lingual (Spanish-speaking) homes where the environment was propitious to the reinforcement of the foreign language. Seventy per cent of the parents of these two groups considered their own level of English as rating either average, good or very good on a five-point scale. Furthermore, most of the children had access to video or films in English and many had older brothers and sisters in the school, as well as English-speaking friends and relations.

The type of bilingual provision in the two establishments was also similar, in that both programmes were of the early partial-immersion type, where the children had eighty per cent of their schooling in Spanish and twenty per cent in English during the entry year. However, there were some notable differences in how the curriculum was organized in the two schools.

In Class A, the class-teacher (bilingual in Spanish and English), together with a Spanish-speaking classroom aide, was responsible for covering all aspects of the curriculum, except for music, physical education and library studies, which were taken by specialists. The mornings were mainly concerned with activities in English and the afternoons were reserved for the development of Spanish. This division shows evidence of a separation approach to language use in the curriculum according to time of day.

The curriculum organization in Class B, on the other hand, was officially based on a policy of complete separation of languages, with respect to time of day, physical space and teacher. A monolingual (Spanish-speaking) class teacher was responsible for all aspects of the curriculum taught in Spanish, with the exception of music, which was taken by a specialist teacher. An English specialist (bilingual in Spanish and English) was in charge of the English activities which took place in the English room for one period per day.

These similarities and differences are summarized in Figure 3.1.

The research approach adopted in the study

Differing strands of research in bilingual classrooms have recently been reviewed by Martin-Jones (1995; 2000) and Hornberger (1995). My own approach has been to build on the third strand of work identified by

Figure 3.1
Characteristics of the classes

Pre-primary entry year

	School A	*School B*
Type of bilingual education provision	Early partial immersion (approx. 80% Sp., 20% Eng.)	Early partial immersion (approx. 80% Sp., 20% Eng.)
Class teacher	Colombian English fluent, but not wholly accurate	Colombian No English
English specialist	——	N. American Bilingual (English-dominant)
Children	25. Age 4+ Majority: functionally monolingual (Spanish)	22. Age 4+ Majority: functionally monolingual (Spanish)

Martin-Jones, namely micro-ethnographic research combined with discourse analysis, which has also been seen as a move towards an interactional sociolinguistic perspective (Hornberger, 1995).

The procedures I used for my data collection and their relation to my research interests are summarized in Figure 3.2.

As can be seen, in my study I focused on two particular bilingual events across the curriculum (teacher storytelling and the teaching and learning of vocabulary areas in the L2) and on how the teachers used code-switching as a communicative resource in their teaching. In this article, however, I report results taken from the area of teacher storytelling alone.

The storytelling events in two classes

The total number of storytelling events recorded in the data was ten. Out of these, I selected six to analyse, three from each teacher. Extracts from these appear in the following discussion. The storytelling sessions were based on stories written in English – two were traditional tales (*The Three Bears* and *Hansel and Gretel*) and four were children's stories written for an L1 audience.

The two teachers concurred in the use of stories as a valuable motivating activity in the classroom and also as an important vehicle for attaining a wide variety of aims, both linguistic and non–linguistic, such as the improvement

Figure 3.2
Research interests and data collection procedures

Classroom discourse, language choice and code-switching

Areas of research interest	Teacher purposes, perceptions and practices	Teacher teaching, storytelling and learning of vocabulary areas	Parental attitudes to bilingual education
Methods used for collecting data	Monthly recorded in-depth interviews and teacher-background questionnaires	Weekly audio-recordings and fieldnotes	Three questionnaires

Note: Data-collection period: September 1989–May 1990.

of listening skills and visual word-recognition, the reinforcement of key L2 lexical items, and to help with the formation of values, in view of what one of the teachers considered to be the degenerating social situation in Colombia.

The storytelling events centred on a large rug in the middle of the class-room, on which the children sat, facing the teacher. In all the sessions the teachers used visual back-up material – usually illustrations from the story-books they were using. However, neither teacher read the text. Instead, they both used their dramatic skills to tell the story to the children. Their story-telling was not only a pedagogic activity, but also a performance. This resonates with an observation made by Wolfson (1982) about the dual nature of storytelling. The two teachers often adapted the written text in the books, in line with aspects of the illustrations. They also frequently drew the chil-dren's attention to the pictures in the books they were using.

Both teachers expressed concern about the children being able to follow the events of the stories they were told, especially in view of their age and lack of L2 knowledge, and also because they were in the first year of bilin-gual schooling. For this reason, they consciously made use of a number of communicative strategies, such as dramatization, gesture and hand move-ments, the repetition of key vocabulary items, and questions to ensure that the children were able to participate in the storytelling process. Another key resource in this respect was the teachers' use of code-switching as a partici-pant-related, facilitation strategy. In Teacher A's words,

> *Si noto que [los ninos] no entienden, inmediatamente les traduzco, porque no quiero crearles a ellos que no entienden y que de pronto se van a sentir mal.*

(If I notice that [the children] do not understand I immediately translate for them, because I do not wish to make them feel that they do not understand and perhaps they will feel bad.)

The teachers' generally relaxed attitudes to their own code-switching practices and those of their pupils were, in some measure, due to a lack of official school pressure to implement a strict separation approach in classroom language use, in spite of a generalized policy of language separation across the curriculum, referred to above. Both practitioners had positive attitudes to their classroom code-switching, as can be seen by the following comment of Teacher A:

En este momento, no me preocupa [la mezcla de idiomas], a los papás tampoco, sino que al contrario, me lo comentaban como cosa buena . . . has sido . . . algo muy positivo que ellos [los niños] van integrando poco a poco el otro idioma a su vida normal.

(At this moment I'm not worried about [the mixture of languages] and the parents aren't either, on the contrary they told me it was good . . . it's been . . . something very positive that they [the children] integrate little by little the other language into their normal life.)

These views reflect the teachers' concern to cushion the children from the possible negative effects of an over-abrupt rupture with their monolingual home environment and show their appreciation of code-switching as a positive resource to help their pupils make the transition towards bilingual development.[1]

Teacher and teacher-directed use of reformulation

So far, I have attempted to situate my work on reformulation with respect to research being carried out on bilingual classroom discourse and also to the social and institutional context of my study. I will now describe the reformulation procedures used by the teachers in the storytelling events I analysed, and how these may be linked to differing pedagogical styles and teaching purposes. In the context of the present discussion, and taking into account the research in discourse analysis and code-switching cited above, I will take interlingual reformulation to refer to the reiteration of utterances in a different code.

Translation

Following Nussbaum (1991), in the present observations I will take the concept of translation itself to refer to a more or less literal rendering of an utterance into another linguistic code. This process may be explicitly signalled by translation markers, or the two utterances may simply be juxtaposed (see Cambra Giné, 1991).

The two teachers in my study sometimes made use of both procedures. At times, they used explicit translation markers such as *es* (is) and *quiere decir* (means) to signal to the children that what followed was a translation of the previous word or utterance in the L2. At other times they merely juxtaposed the two utterances, sometimes separating them by a brief pause, or highlighting them by the use of further contextualization cues, such as change of tone, pace or volume. In the following extract there are examples of both types of reformulation.

Here the teacher was at the beginning of telling the story of *Hansel and Gretel*. She was using a large, illustrated storybook, and made frequent reference to the pictures to illustrate her points. At this point in the event the teacher has just introduced the character of the wicked stepmother, who wants to abandon the children in the woods.

> The lady said *vamos a tener que llevarlos al bosque* (we will have to take them to the forest) take them to the forest – the forest *es el bosque a* (is the forest – to) *ver si ellos alla pueden encontrar comida solitos* (see if they there can find food on their own).

Initially the teacher code-switched into Spanish to demarcate the reported speech of one of the characters from the narration. Then she reformulated the message-bearing part of the preceding Spanish utterance in English. (This was the teacher who had expressed concern about using as much of the L2 as she could in class, in accordance with institutional policy.) In addition, she gave an explicit definition of the meaning of the word 'forest', before continuing with the narration in Spanish, even though the children had already heard the original Spanish utterance. The teacher considered the concept 'forest' to be a vital part of the story and knew that it did not appear in the illustrations in that part of the book. She also repeated the word three times within the following two episodes.

The teacher thus used code-switching to facilitate the children's understanding of events in the story by means of interlingual reformulation. She also used it to differentiate the voice of a character in the story from her voice as narrator.

Paraphrasing

I will now briefly comment on three examples of interlingual paraphrasing – one in Spanish and two in English. The concept of paraphrasing used in this discussion refers to the re-elaboration and modification of a previous utterance (see Py, 1986). All the examples used in this section come from Teacher B, when she was instructing the children how to carry out the actions to a rhyme she was teaching them, prior to the main storytelling activity. I will pay particular attention to the parts of the paraphrases which elaborate on the original utterance in the other language.

The following three extracts refer to Teacher B trying to attract the children's attention before introducing the story of *The Goochoo Bird*.

> Now you listen to me – *me escuchan primero y* (listen to me first and) *repiten despúes* (repeat afterwards).

Here, the Spanish paraphrase was more informative than the original English directive, in that the teacher specified that listening was prior to repetition.

> *Le dije cuando yo hago así* [Teacher places her finger on her lips] (I told you when I do this) when I put my finger on my mouth.

In this example the paraphrase (in English this time) was again more explicit than the Spanish version, which involved the word *así* (like this) accompanied by the gesture of the teacher placing her finger on her lips. The purpose of this gesture was made explicit in the English version.

> *Esa vez si* that's good (That time yes).

In this third example, the teacher used a functional equivalent, in the form of a paraphrase in English, to reinforce her earlier positive evaluation in Spanish of the children's actions.

Teacher B also showed a preference for a more complex type of reformulation, which consisted of a tripartite sequence: an initial English utterance, followed first by a reformulation in Spanish and then by a repetition of the original English utterance, or a paraphrase of it, as in the following example. This extract also comes from *The Goochoo Bird* storytelling session. The story centres around the rude behaviour of a young prince, who is punished by being given a strange bird who makes unreasonable demands on his master. The teacher made frequent reference to the illustrations in the book as she told the story.

Take the goochoo bird *lleveselo* take him down to (take him) the dungeon

Here, the Spanish paraphrase *lleveselo* (take him) is less explicit than the original English version. The teacher used a pronoun *lo* (him) rather than a noun to refer to the goochoo bird. In using this anaphoric form of reference, the teacher maintains cohesion across the reformulated elements. The second English version, 'take him down to the dungeon', conserved the anaphoric reference (the pronoun 'him') and added some additional information, 'down to the dungeon', thus moving the narration on.

At another moment in the same storytelling event the teacher used mime instead of verbal interlingual reformulation. This was an additional means of facilitating the children's understanding of the English utterance.

Y el (And the) goochoo bird ate the cake guaw ooh [Teacher imitates the bird eating] ate the cake.

In the exchanges examined above, and in many others like them, the teachers revealed their concern with ensuring that the learners were able to follow the storyline as it unfolded. These two types of reformulation constituted a means of resolving the tension between the teacher's desire to carry out as much of the classroom interaction as possible in English, while at the same time ensuring pupil understanding and participation in the event. At times, the emphasis was on facilitating understanding; at other times, the teachers seemed to use interlingual reformulation primarily for reasons of emphasis or, as in the case of the complex reformulation sequence, to ensure that the children were fully exposed to the English version of the stories. In doing so, they were conveying a clear message that the language of storytelling in the class was English.

Reformulation and teaching style

Having looked briefly at how the teachers used interlingual reformulation within their storytelling, I would now like to place my discussion in a broader context by considering differences between the two teachers' pedagogic styles and classroom practices.

Teacher B used interlingual reformulation far more than Teacher A (280 instances in three stories in my recorded corpus, in contrast to 20 instances in Teacher A's storytelling events). This significant quantitative difference

may be attributed, in part, to the observed differences in the teaching styles and the modes of story presentation favoured by the two teachers.

Teacher B made extensive reference to the storybook illustrations in her storytelling. In this way, she gave priority to visual material as a meaning-making resource in her storytelling. This relates to her experience both as an artist and art-teacher. She combined the use of visual clues with interlingual reformulation as facilitative strategies. Thus, her classroom storytelling style focused particularly on the creation of images, both verbal and visual, as ways of providing her young learners with access to the story.

Teacher A, on the other hand, used different means of presenting the stories and maintaining the children's involvement in the events. As she commented, '*Creo que el primer recurso soy yo*' (I think that I am the main resource).

Her storytelling style was very dramatic, involving extensive use of gesture, mime, exaggerated facial expressions, changes of pitch and volume, and exclamations. These paralinguistic features were also used in reformulations; they sometimes 'repeated' in a different code. They thus served as key elements of the narrative and as a way of helping the children to understand the events in the story.

So, while both teachers were concerned to facilitate their learners' participation in the events, they chose very different means of doing this, depending on their previous experience and preferred storytelling style. Thus, the children in the two classes were provided with quite different experiences of storytelling in two languages. In one classroom, the events were mainly literacy-related, with talk centring on the storybook and illustrations, while in the second class, relatively little preference was given to the book and paralinguistic features of performance were foregrounded. Furthermore, the reformulation strategies used in the two events differed considerably. Teacher B relied heavily on linguistic reformulation, in the form of word repetition, translating and paraphrasing, while Teacher A made extensive use of reformulation which relied heavily on the use of paralinguistic cues and dramatization, mime and gesture.

Conclusion

In this article I have described some ways in which the two teachers in an immersion context accomplished storytelling events in two languages. I have focused on the recurring patterns of bilingual discourse observed and

recorded in several events, and shown how the teachers modulated their talk so as to help their learners follow the storyline and cope with the moment-by-moment demands of the interaction. I have paid particular attention to the role of teacher reformulation, as a means both of facilitating access to the story for the children and of introducing the L2 into the event.

The code-switching in these storytelling events served other communicative functions that I have described elsewhere (de Mejía, 1994, 1998, 2002). However, I have focused on reformulation in this article as it is a salient feature of bilingual classroom discourse, providing a means for teachers to deal with the communicative challenge of storytelling in a foreign language to young learners who are in the process of becoming bilingual. As Cambra Giné (1991) has shown, looking at instances of bilingual teacher talk like this makes us keenly aware of the essentially repetitive nature of teacher-dominated discourse and of the way it is continually punctuated by parentheses in the sequential flow of the interaction.

Acknowledgements

Note

[1] For futher discussion of bilingual storytelling see de Mejía (1998, 2002).

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