The Dynamics of Bilingual Meeting Talk. Towards a Typology

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This paper focuses on bilingual action in formal meetings without interpretation where Finnish and Swedish are spoken and where case documents are in two languages (see Pilke & Salminen 2013). According to the Language Act of Finland (423/2003) every person has a right to use his or her own language, either Finnish or Swedish, before courts and other authorities. If someone does not understand an oral statement, it shall be explained to him or her briefly on request. In bilingual meetings, the chairperson and other meeting officials take responsibility for guaranteeing the linguistic rights of the participants, but the ways of achieving this collaboratively differ (see e.g. Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris 1997). Therefore, the aim of this paper is to suggest a typology of bilingual action for the context of formal meeting. The typology is based on a comparison of the contents expressed in each of the two languages within a turn. There are different degrees of sameness and difference of content expressed and this can be described with a sliding scale from "speech in two languages", with repetition of identical meanings, to "bilingual speech", with no shared meanings between the two languages. During the meeting the dynamics of bilingual action evolves when every speaker judges what is optimal between these extremes in each situation and the meeting-participants interpret the situation according to their own individual cognitive processing capacity (cf. Gumperz 1982).

Literature


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