

ETUDES HELLENIQUES

HELLENIC STUDIES

**LA DIASPORA GRECQUE
THE GREEK DIASPORA**

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Χρηστικό Λεξικό της Νεοελληνικής Γλώσσας

Academy of Athens (ed. **Christoforos G. Charalambakis**),
Athens: National Printery, 2014.

George Kanarakis*

The task of the lexicographer, to present the ever-evolving “living organism” which a language is and how that language is spoken, written and conceptualised by its users, is a laborious and never-ending task. A work which exemplifies such labour is the recently published (2014) Χρηστικό Λεξικό της Νεοελληνικής Γλώσσας of the Academy of Athens. Dr Christoforos Charalambakis, Professor of Linguistics, Department of Philology of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, is the dictionary’s editor and compiler. Under his expert direction this imposing dictionary was completed within an eleven-year period (2003-2014).

The Χρηστικό Λεξικό is an impressive achievement in that it presents the lexical treasury of the Greek language in its most dynamic and representative form, as it appears and is used today at the beginning of the 21st century. Based on more than a decade of original and painstaking research, the corpus of this dictionary records 75,000 entries of the 120,000 in the electronic base, as well as about 5000 neologisms that are not found in any of the other Modern Greek language dictionaries. Examples of the latter include *αναγνωρισιμότητα*, *αντιμνημονιακός*, *γενόσημα*, *έμπολα* (Eng. Ebola virus, 1976), *μπότοξ*, *νευρωτικά δίκτυα*, *σκάιπ* (Eng. skype, 2003), etc., while many have already become internationalisms in the form of loan translations (calques). Also, it features 103 branches of knowledge including some recorded for the first time, such as *βαριατρική*, *ιχθυοπαθολογία*, *μουσειογραφία*, *φυτοτεχνολογία* κ.ά. In addition, abbreviations, symbols, as well as Latin phrases and non-Greek acronyms complete the entire scholarly work.

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The volume (21 x 29.50 and weighing 3 kilos and 650 grams), printed by the National Printery of Greece, consists of 1,819 pages formatted into three columns and in two colours.

This dictionary is neither historical in approach nor intended only for experts, but being contemporary and practical, it presents the living Greek language as it functions today and appeals to a wide readership. On this aspect, the Secretary General and Member of the Academy of Athens, Mr. Vasilios Ch. Petrakos states in the prologue to the Dictionary: “The Academy, with the Χρηστικό Λεξικό does not aim at the regulation of the language, ... It presents in a systematic and scientifically verified way the real face of Modern Greek, its language richness and its wondrous capabilities.... The great multitude of neologisms and of new meanings included in the Χρηστικό Λεξικό constitutes the true evidence of this fact which demonstrates the Greeks’ creative power in language and proves false those who lament its corruption”.

The dictionary, based on the frequency of the use of the words, but also on the extent of their usage that is reinforced by modern technology and the advancement of sciences (like those mentioned above), is a powerful tool to access the international vocabulary which has entered the Greek language. So, Professor Charalambakis in producing this dictionary, which apart from presenting the wealth and fullness of expression of contemporary Greek language and through this the Greek socio-cultural reality, increases the ability of the users of Greek, whether the native Greek speaker, the second/foreign language learner, the translator, the teacher as well as the literary writer and the media professionals to communicate effectively in a globalised context. The Χρηστικό Λεξικό also reflects how the Greek language has kept pace with the acceleration of the contemporary global reality and responds dynamically to the growing influence of constantly changing technologies, mass media and sciences, rather than to the influence of literature as used to happen in the past. In parallel, the dictionary incorporates and projects a scientific, impartial point of view. The research data, in this case the words and expressions of the Greek language itself at the beginning of the 21st century, are presented as they exist and function in the everyday life of its users.

In the introduction to the dictionary and in the directions for its use (pp. 13-14), the innovations of this work are outlined and in many cases with examples. A close examination of the dictionary confirms, furthermore, that these

innovations provide a range of significant advantages for its users in both oral communication and writing. Among other innovations, are the following:

- The organisation of the headwords, derived from extensive databases including the National Thesaurus of the Greek Language, InterActive Terminology for Europe, the Google search engine, electronic data bases and electronic dictionaries of English, French, German, Italian and Spanish, as well as particular databases of the Academy of Athens.
- The establishment of double spelling for 500 words, such as *αβγό* – *αυγό*, *εταιρεία* – *εταιρία*, *συγγνώμη* – *συγνώμη* κ.ά.
- The concise and essential definitions of the headwords.
- The inclusion of the scientific nomenclature of animals and plants.
- The unification of the meanings of the entries, differentiating them from their usage, as illustrated by the verb *κόβω*, which according to some dictionaries has 53 meanings, whereas according to this dictionary the meanings number only ten and the rest are treated as uses.
- The provision of modern meanings of words, illustrated by authentic examples and phrases used by people in contemporary everyday life, including the year in which an English or French loan word first appeared.
- The analytic presentation of the combinative abilities of the Greek words, such as *ομορφιά* – *αγγελική*, *ασύγκριτη*, *ανδρική*, *γυναικεία*, etc.
- The accurate stylistic identification of words and phrases based on 30 categories, for example, slang, archaic, humorous, etc.
- The treatment of the stereotypical or idiomatic expressions and lexical combinations, given from a new viewpoint at the end of each entry.
- The presentation of the headwords not only in the monotonic, but also in the polytonic system.
- The syllabication of all headwords of the entries.

These innovations and others, in addition to the high standard of research, compilation, writing and presentation of the work in organising and producing this outstanding work make it an essential, worthy and valuable resource.

Not unexpectedly, this dictionary does not make any judgements about what

is “proper” or standard. Rather it describes the Greek language in the natural and unpretentious way that it is expressed by its Greek speakers. Moreover, in the 21st century the rate of change precludes the language being limited by fixed “standards” imposed in previous centuries. In an interview published in the Athenian newspaper *To Vima* (9/11/2014), Professor Charalambakis stated characteristically: “Shall we ostracize the “ugly” words and keep only the “beautiful ones. If we hide them, it doesn’t mean that they don’t exist”.

Finally, it is admirable and encouraging that, as the Member of the Academy Mr. Petrakos states in his prologue to the dictionary, the electronic form of this work will continue being enriched. As with other quality international dictionaries, such as the Oxford Language Dictionaries, Merriam-Webster, etc., this will be a significant accomplishment as it will insure that the dictionary will continue to keep pace with the ongoing linguistic and socio-cultural developments of the Greek language. After all, as Professor Charalambakis asserted in his lecture on the launch of the *Χρηστικό Λεξικό της Νεοελληνικής Γλώσσας* at the Academy of Athens, “No dictionary can cover completely the aims which its compilers set from the beginning.... The composition of a dictionary in essence is never brought to completion since language evolves and is enriched with new elements constantly”.