

The Greek Language in the Diaspora

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Expatriation has been a consistent theme in Greek history since the years immediately after the Fall of Constantinople (1453)¹ until 1980, when Greece began receiving economic migrants and refugees. Greek-speaking communities and clusters of Greek presence were established throughout the world, even in the most remote places. Only recently (post-1974), Greek settlement experience from a socio-cultural and linguistic perspective became a focal point in research for national identity and ethnic studies. During the long periods of settlement in foreign lands, Greeks chose to maintain their ethno-linguistic and religious identity, establishing communities and Greek schools. Unfortunately, since Independence (1830), and until recently (1974), Greece did not possess, at government level, any language policy for the Greeks of the diaspora.

In 2009, it is estimated that approximately 70% of the Greeks in the diaspora estimated to 4 500 000 people, reside in the English speaking countries.² In all of those countries English had been transplanted in the 18th century and assumed the status of dominant language. Whilst most people in Anglophone nations are English monolinguals, the majority of these countries' original inhabitants, both indigenous and migrant, were largely multilinguals. Beginning from 1880, new perspectives of language contact situation have arisen through immigration as new language communities have been established in Anglophone nations. The remaining 30% of the diaspora Greeks have settled in Europe (Germany, France, Belgium, Holland, Scandinavian countries, Former Soviet Union), where Greek has been in contact with the languages of the nation-states³, in Latin America, where Greek has been in contact with the Iberian languages, in Africa and South Eastern Asia where Greek has been competing with colonial languages and extremely diverse local dialects.

Greek immigrants began settling these English-speaking nations⁴ in large waves during the last 130 years, particularly in Canada, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Britain and South Africa. Throughout this period, certain

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oppressive policies towards linguistic minorities were imposed almost in all Anglophone nations for a long period of time, at least until the mid 1960s. Greek began to compete in status and in the number of speakers in these countries with robust colonial languages (Spanish, German, French, Dutch), with neo-trade languages (Japanese, Indonesian, Mandarin) and with other strong ethnic languages (i.e. Italian, Slavic, Arabic) as well as with refugee languages (i.e. Vietnamese). Greek remained a strong language in the Diaspora as a result of its homogeneity, its socio-cultural value in the definition of identity, the organised community networks and the prevailing receptive attitudes in the host countries during the last quarter of the 20th century. In the course of this period, successive Greek governments “discovered” the Greeks in Diaspora as “ὁμογενεῖς” (homogeneis = of the same clan) not without much semantic confusion, creating a new structure for their representation.⁵ Greek government policies regarding the Greek language in Diaspora were also systematically implemented gaining momentum among the members of the Greek communities and attracting support of the European Union.⁶

In the field of research into language contact⁷, increasing prominence is being given to the study of immigrant languages, particularly in North America and Australia as the relevant bibliography attests (see Dixon and Aikhenvald in this volume). The more substantial studies concluded that immigrant languages, including Greek, are in the process of decay under the constant pressure of an asymmetrical and unstable bilingual contact and because of limitations of use. Similar studies in Europe⁸ concluded that immigrant languages are doomed through contact with the host language.

It has been correctly argued that in a language contact situation the simplest possible form of linguistic influence is that in which a single item is plucked out of one language and used in the context of another and that this kind of linguistic ‘borrowing’ presupposes a bilingual situation. The dimensions and limitations of two languages in contact include a rearrangement of pattern in the structured domains of the ethnic languages as well as an interaction of linguistic patterns, whilst the code of the languages involved in the contact situation never remains stable at any point in time. The contrastive analysis such as that contained in this volume (Janse, Kanarakis, Tamis) reveals linguistic variations from the norm of either language (Greek, Turkish, Arabic and English), which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language, although the deviations will basically characterize the minority language, namely Greek. These linguistic variations

concerning Greek as a minority language in Turkey, and/or the Anglophone countries could be justified, among mainly 2nd, 3rd and 4th generation of Greeks, by the fact that Greek is spoken in an environment where socio-cultural and psychological pressures tend to work against it. In theory, the influence of two different languages can be mutual, if each has its own area of prestige, however in practice this is rather difficult with the exception of the economic environment, where substantial financial losses as a result of monolingual attitudes may trigger or induce the usage of the minority language (Angouri).

In the papers presented in this volume, it is shown that there is some degree of mutual exchange of linguistic influence (Janse, Kanarakis, Tamis), not only because Greek has created its own areas of prestige (socio-cultural events, community functions, educational and ecclesiastic celebrations), but mainly because it is impossible for the non-Greek born bilingual to keep his/her languages completely apart. The prevailing conclusion from the analysis of the papers presented in this volume is that, unless there is an isobar language situation, such as Canadian diglossia, it is not possible to have two separate speakers in one person. Thus, in language contact situation significant changes occur in the linguistic systems of Greek when the condition of keeping the languages apart is not met.

In her article **Angouri** views the phenomenon of Greek-English bilingualism in a financial-social environment arguing that corporate companies and employees are expected to be globally mobile and to work efficiently and effectively with colleagues from different national backgrounds. She reaffirms the importance of English for international business being the working language of many corporate companies irrespectively of their ownership. However, she concludes that workplace cannot operate on the basis of one language only and a number of other languages, including Greek, have a role to play in the daily life of employees in corporate environments.

Dixon and Aikhenvald, using as a basis, a research project currently in progress in Australia and Argentina, discuss language contact as a mechanism of comparative cultural interaction and inter-ethnic communication. Their study critically overviews and assesses the structure and use of Greek in Diaspora in the Australian and Argentinean sociolinguistic environments, monitoring and evaluating the mechanisms of change under differential conditions and sources of influence. The authors provide a concise and erudite version of the current language contact bibliography.

Janse investigates the Greek-Turkish language contact in Asia Minor, concentrating upon Cappadocian, a Greek-Turkish mixed language formerly spoken by Greek Orthodox Christians in Central Anatolia. It was generally believed that Cappadocian died out in the 1960s, until Mark Janse and Dimitris Papazachariou discovered that a Cappadocian dialect is still spoken as a first language by several hundreds of people in Northern and Central Greece. Janse believes that "*Misti*" is the only Cappadocian dialect that is still used as a vernacular. Cappadocian is an archaic Medieval Greek dialect which became increasingly turkicized after the Seljuk and Ottoman invasions from the eleventh century onwards.

Kanarakis supports the view that cross-linguistic transfers are a natural, universal phenomenon and not accidental, whatever the motives. His paper focuses on the diachronic linguistic situation due to cross-linguistic contact between Greek and Australian English, that is, the impact of the latter on Greek in the ethnolectic context of Australia and that of Greek (both Standard Modern and Ancient) on Australian English. He examines both direct and indirect transfers, as well as their impact on different levels of language (phonological, morphological, lexical), illustrated by a variety of relevant oral and written examples.

Tanis examines language contact in class situation with students of English language background acquiring Greek. He elaborates on language incentives that could motivate students of Greek as well as students of English, discussing various aspects of Greek, including its flexibility, its word inflexion, its prefixes and suffixes (diminutive words, the agent suffixes, the patronymic suffixes, the great number of the compound words and possibly of forming new compound words) and the way that these have been transferred to English. He investigates a number of teaching mechanisms related to language contact phenomena from a language acquisition perspective.

Tamis reports a sociolinguistic study of the state of Greek language in Australia as spoken by native-speaking Greek immigrants and their children. Emphasis is given to the analysis of the linguistic behaviour of these Greek Australians which is attributed to contact with English and to other environmental, social and linguistic influences. The paper discusses the non-standard phenomena in various types of inter-lingual transferences in terms of their incidence and causes and, in correlation with social, linguistic and psychological factors in order to determine the extent of language assimilation, attrition, the content, context and medium of the language-event.

An outcome emerging from the contributions of this volume is that Greek has a future in the Diaspora, despite being under constant threat as a result of its contact with powerful and culturally enriched dominant languages. Ethnic ties in the Hellenic Diaspora are well preserved and in certain cases even strengthened, though perhaps in subtle ways. Even in Latin American countries where Greek language maintenance has severely weakened, Greek culture and ethnic vitality remains strong. On the other hand, Greece is a country which, following the massive immigration of at least over one million European, Asian and African economic migrants (1980-2009), can no longer aspire to be a linguistically homogeneous country. Furthermore, the determination of the Hellenic national center and of the Republic of Cyprus to extend their socio-economic and political boundaries to embrace the vast and robust Hellenic Diaspora, offering their members voting rights and a share in home power and authority, also necessitates well-defined language policies both in the domestic front, as well as abroad. The maintenance of Greek in Diaspora should be recognized as being in the public interest of Greece and Cyprus and as the important tool for bonding the Metropolis with global Hellenism and *vice versa*.

The articles presented in this volume also depict the notion that inductive investigations of Greek spoken outside Greece should provide a foundation for recognising diasporic varieties of Greek as *ethnolects*, or even global, regional dialects in their own right – arguably alleviating persistent popular attitudes to non-standard varieties of speaking as deficient, or inferior, rather than just different.

NOTES

1. See in particular the volume of Α. Βακαλόπουλος (1973), *Ιστορία του Νέου Ελληνισμού 1669-1812*, Τόμος Δ', Θεσσαλονίκη. Α. Βακαλόπουλος (2000), *Νέα Ελληνική Ιστορία (1204-1985)*, Βάνιας, Θεσσαλονίκη.
2. In 2008, according to different sources (bibliography, statistical data and archival material), the number of Greek settlers in English speaking countries is estimated to 3,150,000, as follows: USA, 2,100,000, Australia, 506,000, United Kingdom, 310,000, Canada, 240,000, South Africa, 40,000 and New Zealand, 4000. For a more detailed account on the statistics of the Greek Diaspora see: Ioannis K. Hassiotis, Olga Katsiardi-Herring and Eurydice Ambatzis (eds.) (2006), *The Greeks in Diaspora (15th – 20th century)*, Greek Parliament, Athens (in greek); Th. Saloutos (1964), *The Greeks in United States*, Harvard University Press; A. M.

Tamis (2005), *The Greeks in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Ιωάννης Κ. Χασιώτης (1993), *Σύντομη Επισκόπηση της Ελληνικής Διασποράς*, Βάνιας, Θεσσαλονίκη; Peter Chimbos, 1980), *The Canadian Odyssey, The Greek Experience in Canada*, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart.

3. See S. Romaine, *Languages in Australia*, CUP, 1991:19ff. She illustrates the marginalization of the languages and cultures of the European states which could be seen as a form of ‘internal colonialism’: “In most of them there are minorities (both indigenous and non-indigenous), whose languages do not have the same rights as those granted to the official languages...”
4. With the exception of the metropolis UK, all other Anglophone countries were British colonial territories lacking the concept of the nation-state notion and thus the coloniser’s language became both prestigious and essential.
5. The *World Council for Greeks Abroad* (Συμβούλιο Απόδημου Ελληνισμού-ΣΑΕ) was established in 1995 and the systematic protection of the Greeks in Diaspora became an integral part of the Greek Constitution.
6. Reference is made here to the *Program “Paideia Omogenon”* (Program for the Education of Greeks Abroad) undertaken by the EDIAMME, University of Crete, which was one of the four broad language oriented Programs, supported by the European Union.
7. Two or more languages are in contact, if they are known and used alternatively by the same persons. The term ‘language contact’ was used first by W. von Humboldt in 1836 and Edgar Sturtevant in 1917.
8. See in particular the works of Afendras, E. A., *Stability of a bilingual situation and Arumanian bilingualism*, *Canadian Linguistic Association*, Toronto, 1969 (Arumanian), Femiglietti, M., “Bilingualism in an Italo-Albanian community and a didactic suggestion”, *Passagna Italiana di Linguistica Applicata*, V. 7, 1975: 2-3, (Italo-Albanian), Clyne, M. G., “German and English working pidgins”, *Congress on Pidgins and Creoles*, Honolulu, 1975 (German), Riffer-Macek, D., *Some marginalia of Language Contact*, Zagreb, 1976 (Slavic languages), Rubattel, C., “Studies on language contact”, *Etudes de Linguistique Appliquée*, V. 21: 20-32, 1976 (Italian, French, German, Rumanian in Switzerland), Bakos, F., *Rumanian Elements in the Hungarian Lexicon and some Problems of Linguistic Borrowing*, Budapest, 1977 (Rumanian), Tedeschi, G., “Language and cultures in contact: The language problem in Hypponax”, *Incontri Linguistici*, V. 4, 2: 225-233, 1978 (Greco-Italian).