



HELLENIC REPUBLIC  
National and Kapodistrian  
University of Athens

# European Perspectives in Language Teaching, Learning, Assessment

Language and language education policies:  
Challenges for Greece

Bessie Dendrinou

School of Philosophy

Faculty of English Language and Literature

# Policy across languages and cultures

- The English term ‘policy’ has no equivalent in most other European languages which make no distinction between the terms ‘language policy’ and ‘language politics’ (e.g., *politique linguistique*, *Sprachpolitik*, *políticas lingüísticas*, *γλωσσικές πολιτικές*, etc.).
- In English, the term ‘policy’ has no single meaning, as the nature of the practices that it is meant to signify differs from one sociocultural context to another.
- Policy is neither an ideologically free concept nor an ideologically neutral social practice.



# Policy: a polysemous term (1/2)

In English, 'policy' often suggests:

- planned course of action,
- deliberate strategy,
- principled approach.



# Policy: a polysemous term (2/2)

However, it may also refer to:

- norms and social practices,
- incidental decisions made by authorities in the form of pronouncements,
- governmental decrees,
- state and/or supra-state regulations,
- higher or lower level laws.



# Language policy: 'stated' and 'unstated'

- When there is no enunciated policy on particular language matters, there is implicit or explicit recognition that the way things work with language **is** policy.
- Policy may be based on precedent rather than statute.
- Social action or practices regarding language use issues may derive from (and/or be consistent with) a country's constitution, laws and other 'legal' documents.



# Designing deliberate language policy

- To design deliberate language policy means **to regulate** which language, languages or language varieties are used, where and when.
- Regulation of language issues involves ideologically loaded decisions whether they are:
  - seemingly trivial matters such as road signs.
  - social matters such as the language of advertisements.
  - related to the job market and the economy.
  - issues regarding the futures of peoples.
  - life-threatening issues.



# Language and language education policies (1/2)

All societies have policies about:

- **how** language or languages are used (e.g. in the social space, in the media, etc.) and **which** languages are used.
- what rights and/or privileges language users have.
- in which language people can access information and education.
- which languages are promoted on a state level (e.g. state education) and on a supranational level (i.e. EU).



# Language and language education policies (2/2)

Language education policy may be articulated in different types of documents, the main ones being curricula documents.





# Investigating language policy in a society (1/2)

- Language policies may or may not be deliberate.
- They may or may not be stated in written document form.
- Deliberate policies may or may not be implemented (follow up is not always planned or designed).
- Language policies may also be tacit.
- They may also be disguised in the actions of government officials, employers, businesses, the media, community groups, etc.



# Investigating language policy in a society (2/2)

- Uncovering implicit language policies is just as important as disclosing deliberate policies.
- The investigation of language policies is complicated because language matters are always politically loaded.
- How one seeks the data from where or from whom can produce different results.
- Who it is that interprets the data and for what purpose makes a significant difference in the results.



# The use of the official, national language (1/2)

- Since 1976, when the diglossic issue was resolved demotic Greek is the official variety used for all functions in the country.
- It is used for all documents and manuals aimed to protect consumers, patients, clients and to safeguard citizens' rights.
- There is 'movement' of information in Greek through the internet, though the latter is somewhat limited; therefore, many users resort to the information abundantly available in English.



# The use of the official, national language (2/2)

- The problem with the use of the Latin alphabet (the so-called Greeklish) for e-mail messages has caused strong reactions from the political far-right and the far-left.
- Most street signs and other signs in places frequented by Speakers of Other languages are in Greek and using the Latin alphabet.
- Information frequented by tourists is articulated in Greek and English (and sometimes in other languages, such as German, Italian, Swedish – it very much depends on the type of tourism a place has).



# Language use in social domains

Greek is used in all social domains:

- public services,
- educational institutions,
- the workplace.



# Language use in the media (1/2)

- The media use Greek –though there are some newspapers with Greek news in English as well as in lesser used languages, such as Bulgarian and Arabic because of the communities of immigrants.
- In big city centres, one finds Anglo-american press but also French, German, Italian and Spanish, as well as press from the Balkan and ex Soviet Union countries.



# Language use in the media (2/2)

- Radio programmes are in Greek but radio stations provide Greek and world news in English and other languages – including immigrant languages.
- Talk shows and news on TV are in Greek, and there are several sit coms and films in Greek; but, the TV (and cinema) film industry is dominated by American English. There are also some popular serials in Spanish and Portuguese. Everything, except children's programmes which are dubbed, is subtitled.



# Language policies

There is need for language policies for social justice:

- in the media (differential treatment / gender issues/ translation).
- in the press (gender issues/ translation).
- in advertising (gender issues/ translation).
- for scientific research and academic publications.





# Language use in the workplace (1/2)

- Greek is used in the labour market but one need not have a certificate of language competence in Greek in order to get a job.
- Social literacy is expected in the workplace and social affairs, but grammatical and orthographic literacy are considered necessary while a significant lexical is a matter of social prestige.



# Language use in the workplace (2/2)

- However, other languages are also important for job seekers (dominant languages and particularly English, German, Spanish, Russian, French, Italian – more or less in that order). Job applicants for public services are awarded significant credit points for their certified competence in each ‘foreign’ language.
- The state language certificate of language competence based on national foreign language examinations aim at facilitating this goals among many others.
- The national foreign language examination system has been a great challenge for Greece in recent years.



# Language rights in Greece (1/2)

- The Greek state recognizes the right of anyone to use his/her mother tongue privately or in public.
- Other languages spoken by minority populations in the past (languages such as varieties of Albanian, Vlach and Rom) did and do not have an official status.
- The only minority language with official status today is Turkish in Thrace (an area in northern Greece).



# Language rights in Greece (2/2)

- Greece, as many EU member states, is a multilingual society, as there are many different groups of economic immigrants from the Balkans, Asia and Africa, and each ethnic group has the right to use its own language both privately and in public.
- The rights of the hearing impaired have recently been recognized and action taken.

**It is a challenge for Greece to provide greater help to the groups of incoming immigrants and to the hearing impaired.**



# Support provided to SOL in Greece (1/2)

- Greece conforms to European law regarding legal rights and, in courts, the state provides SOL (speakers of other languages) with interpreters.
- In legal services, information documents are in Albanian, Russian, English and French.



# Support provided to SOL in Greece (2/2)

- For asylum seekers, there are instructions, guides and other info documents in English, French, Turkish and Arabic.
- At immigration office(s) and in the Social Security Office besides written information, interpretation services are supposed to be provided.

**The challenge for Greece is to follow through implementation of recent language policies that is relevant to its new social reality.**



# The language education of SOL (1/2)

- Only in Thrace is there a funded (Greek-Turkish) bilingual education programme (mainly addressed to the Muslim population).
- There are several free-of-charge adult-education programmes for the teaching of Greek to SOL in the urban areas –for immigrants and for repatriated Greeks of the diaspora.
- There is increasing support for GSL (Greek as a second language) in primary and secondary schools in mainstream and in after-school- support classes, while there several GSL teacher-training and post-graduate programmes.



# The language education of SOL (2/2)

- There are few other programmes, besides that in Thrace, which use languages other than Greek to access knowledge but these are for the privileged social groups and they are linked to the dominant languages in the French, English, German, American and international schools in Athens and Thessaloniki. They have long used CLIL (Content and language integrated learning).

**It is a challenge for Greece to create more opportunities for the children of immigrants to access knowledge in their L1 – but there is also the issue of integration**





# Language policies in education (1/2)

- As in many other European countries, there is a lack of deliberate strategy actions (and monitoring of implementation plans) for the use of languages in school and university
- There are a few written documents identifying the scope of operations and of the language programme in primary schools where language problems of various social and ethnic groups need a commonly agreed approach.



# Language policies in education (2/2)

- As in most other European countries, there is no language policy across the curriculum in secondary schools, tackling the problems of the language in different disciplines (no genre-based education).
- There are no deliberate written document policies for social justice issues (critical language awareness, bilingual education, differential treatment, gender fair language use) in schools or in tertiary education



# The language education policy project (1/2)

- The University of Athens has been funded through the ESF and the state to develop the first coherent language education policy, as explicit strategy to promote multilingualism
- The project, carried out at the RCEL started in 2010 and the results will be available in 2013 (information about the project is available in Greek and shortly in English at: <http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/xenesglosses>)



# The language education policy project (2/2)

- The principled approaches and strategies being articulated follow the European Commission's recommendations and is taking into account the principled approach of the Civil Society Platform to promote multilingualism.



# A new national unified language curriculum

- Language curricula in schools are policy documents.
- A new languages curriculum has been developed, and it is the first multilingual curriculum Greece has ever had.
- The curriculum project started in 2010 and it is now being piloted in schools throughout the country.
- The curriculum documents are available in Greek and shortly in English: [rcel.enl.uoa.gr/xenesglosses](http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/xenesglosses).



# EU policy and foreign language education (1/2)

- The challenge for Greece and many other EU countries:
  - “Foreign” language teaching and learning is still –for the large percentage of the population– synonymous with the teaching and learning of languages that are widely used in the world and associated with economic and political power as well as social prestige.
  - Expectations of parents, of students themselves, and of FL teachers are still dominated by the NS paradigm.



# EU policy and foreign language education (2/2)

- International FL teaching and learning materials and exam systems are still used and they are largely dependent on monolingual ideologies and a monocultural ethos of communication.
- Initial FL teacher education programmes in universities and other institutions, as well as FL teachers' continuing education in many EU countries are still largely the colonial enterprises they used to be in the past.



# Foreign language teaching and learning (1/2)

Steps already taken:

- Language learning starts earlier than before. Greece along with some other EU countries has introduced a foreign language (English) from the first year of primary school. Information in Greek and shortly in English at <http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/peap/>.
- Social demand for language proficiency in foreign languages has propped low-fee privately owned language schools all over the country, offering English, German, Spanish, French, Italian, Russian and Chinese (plus Greek as a second language).





# Foreign language teaching and learning (2/2)

- University centers offer more than 32 languages at very low fees.
- At the level of tertiary education there are regulations about languages that students seeking to be accepted in tertiary education should be competent in, and also about which languages can be used in which under- and post-graduate programmes.



# Financing

- The present educational material has been developed as part of the educational work of the instructor.
- The project “Open Academic Courses of the University of Athens” has only financed the reform of the educational material.
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Notes

# Note on History of Published Version

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<http://opencourses.uoa.gr/courses/ENL13/> .



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