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Greek Language and Multilingualism Laboratory (GLML)

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Multilingual information for migrant and refugee students in Greek schools: issues of linguistic landscape and educational policy



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Outline of the paper

- ▶ **Linguistic Landscape and Schools**
- ▶ **Action research projects in Greek schools with migrant and refugee students**
- ▶ **Research questions and findings**
- ▶ **Tentative conclusions: Attitudes, agency and educational policy**

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Linguistic Landscape

- ▶ Linguistic Landscape (LL) as a field of semiotic and sociolinguistic inquiry (Gorter, 2006; Backhaus, 2007; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009).
- ▶ LL defined by the social psychologists Landry and Bourhis: “the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25).
- ▶ Peircean theory: need for an interpretation of the written signs encountered in the city streets with a combination of the three semiotic functions: indexical, iconic and symbolic.
- ▶ This ‘semiosis’ as a cooperation of a sign, its object, and its interpretant (Buchler, 1955, p. 99).

Linguistic ‘Cityscape’

Main characteristics of previous research in the field of linguistic ‘cityscape’:

- ▶ 1. Predominantly quantitative orientation (with the exception of the works of Calvet 1994, Scollon & Scollon 2003, Reh 2004)
- ▶ 2. Studies on linguistic signs exclusively
- ▶ 3. Consideration of written messages attached to immovable carriers in public space
- ▶ 4. Focus on shop signs and advertisement billboards
- ▶ 5. Interest in globalization and its impact on local linguistic ecologies (spread of English; bi-/multi-lingualism).

Linguistic ‘Schoolscape’

Relatively recent studies focusing on LL in the context of schools with bilingual / multilingual students: Brown (2012), Gorter & Cenoz (2015), Dessler (2015), Szabó (2015), Bellinzona (2018).

1. Focus on the presence of languages in school settings and on their functions;
2. Special interest in minority languages;
3. Emphasis on the role of principals and teachers in the construction of Linguistic Schoolscape.

Our research in Greek schools: Scope and methodology

Initially, Linguistic Schoolscape (LS) came up as a secondary goal in the framework of several projects run by GLMLab and involving schools in Greece:

- ▶ *Teach for Integration (T4I)* project, funded by UNICEF in 2018 and 2019
- ▶ *ALP (Accelerated Learning Programmes)* project, funded by UNICEF in 2019 and 2020
- ▶ *Schools for All* project, funded by EAA Grants in 2019 and 2020.

The above projects were exploring action research aiming at the inclusion of migrant and refugee students in Greece. The importance of LS emerged during interventions implemented for these projects, and we planned a complementary research on LS, firstly on multilingual information available in schools, and then on more general use of multilingual LS (resources, teaching/learning, creativity).

Our research in Greek schools: Scope and methodology (2)

Research questions

- ▶ What are the margins left by officially proclaimed educational policy to local initiatives aiming at displaying multilingual information?
- ▶ What are the factors determining the acceptance of multilingual SL? How the cases of these schools are perceived by several stakeholders inside and outside the school community?
- ▶ Who and why creates multilingual LS in schools?
- ▶ If and to what extent multilingual information facilitates the inclusion of migrant and refugee to these schools?

Our research in Greek schools: Scope and methodology (3)

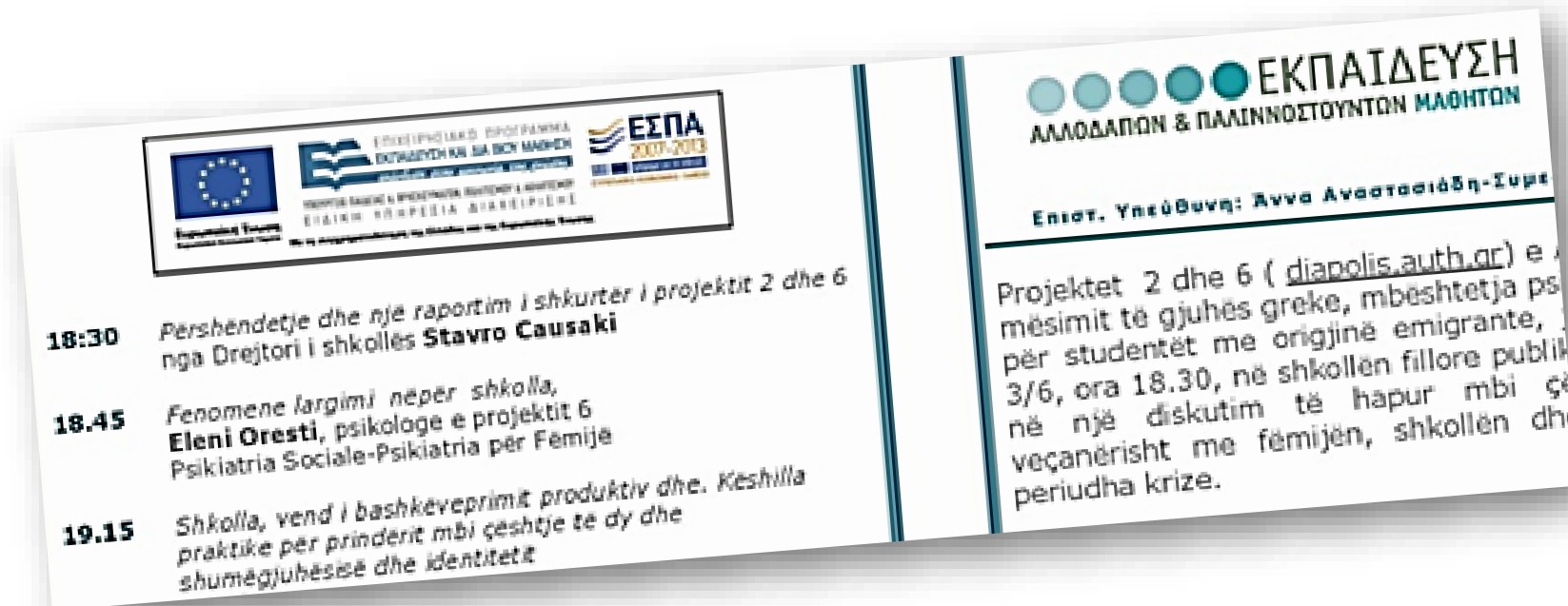
Methodology

- ▶ *Data collected in 12 schools, 6 of lower secondary education and 6 of primary education, with a significant percentage (15-55% of the total student population) of migrant/refugee students, in 4 geographical regions of Greece.*
- ▶ *Schools already involved in inclusion-oriented projects.*
- ▶ *Qualitative methodology: action research and ethnography.*
- ▶ *Data collection tools: documents-photos-videos, field notes, semi-directive interviews.*

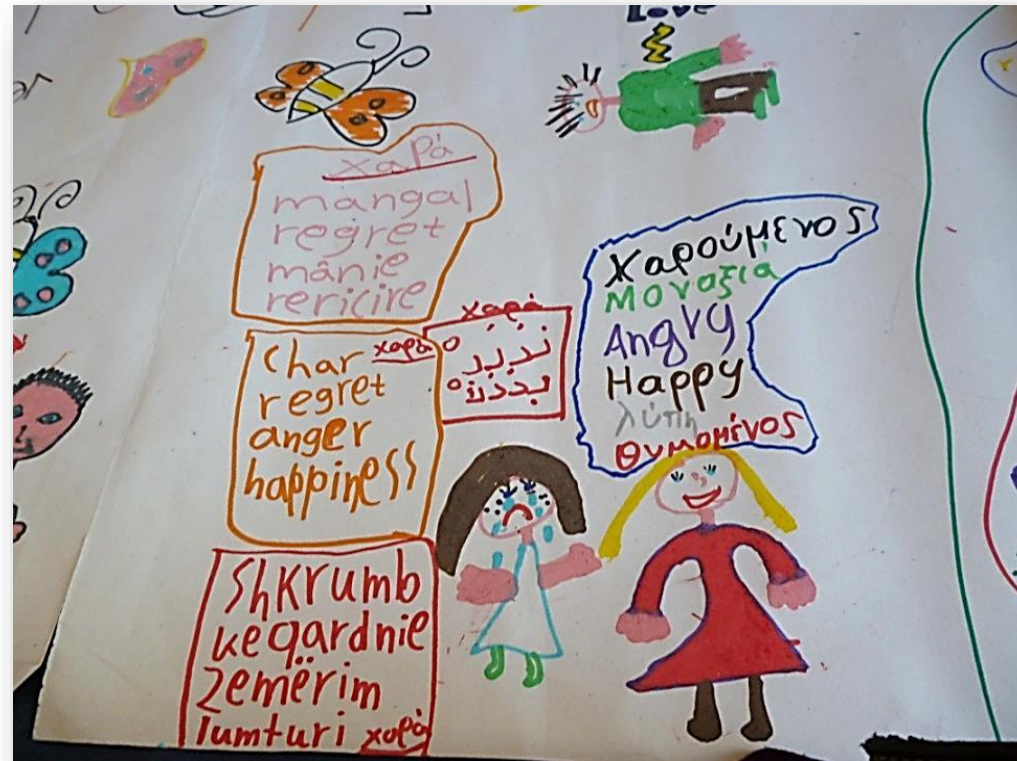
Excerpts from the corpus: Posters



Excerpts from the corpus: invitation translated.



Excerpts from the corpus: Creative ML learning



Main findings (1)

RQ 1

(What are the margins left by officially proclaimed educational policy to local initiatives aiming at displaying multilingual information?)

“Multilingual signs are not forbidden, but they are not explicitly allowed. One more ‘weight’ on my shoulders” (S3 Principal)

Multilingual LS is a case-by-case phenomenon. There is no transfer of practices, and it was not an issue in any of the communities (teachers, parents) that we were aware of. The lack of official policy regarding LS may be an opportunity!

Main findings (2)

RQ 2

(What are the factors determining the acceptance of multilingual SL? How the cases of these schools are perceived by several stakeholders inside and outside the school community?)

“If multilingual inscriptions do not upset the local community, I see no reason why they should not be present in my school” (S9 Principal)

The choice for multilingual LS is a matter of “situated” policy. Inscriptions in school buildings are considered as a public LL, therefore approval of the surrounding community is desired. In local contexts that are not favorable to migration, migrant languages are not visible in the LS.

“Strong” international languages, such as English, but also French, German, are clearly more present in Greek LS. Among the Ls of migrant communities, there are different categories: for instance, Arabic and Chinese are often met (cf. Bellinzona, 2018); Kurdish (Sorani of Kurmanji), Farsi or Urdu very rarely in learning or decorative activities, not at all for more ‘public’ functions.

Main findings (3)

RQ 3

(Who and why creates multilingual LS in schools?)

“It all started by my own initiative, I didn’t asked for a permission! Are we taking permission when we decorate our classrooms? This is for them, for the refugee kids. They were happy, they felt welcome. And then they took crayons and pastels and brushes. And so we realized that this is a right for refugee kids and it is fun and participatory for all our kids” (S8 Primary Teacher)

Teachers are in the center of multilingual LS. Depending on their ideology, attitudes, background, strategies, they encourage (or not) the construction of multilingual LS. As a consequence, students may be involved. Other agents, such as parents, do not take active

Main findings (4)

RQ 4 (If and to what extent multilingual information facilitates the inclusion of migrant and refugee to these schools?)

“Posters with many languages, with the languages of our students is a crucial step for the tolerance of these other languages in the classroom and in the schoolyard. And for their use for pedagogical purposes. And that changes everything!” (S12 Secondary Teacher of Greek).

There is a clear correlation of the existence of multilingual LS with the construction of an inclusive environment in Greek schools, and it goes through the use of multiple languages, outside the official curriculum, in teaching/learning activities.

Concluding remarks (1): LS and attitudes towards migration, agency and educational policy

- LS open to migrant languages in Greek schools presupposes:
 - Positive attitudes of principals and teachers towards migration;
 - Plurilingual and intercultural training of the teachers;
 - Curiosity and open-mind;
 - Perception of the school as a whole.
- Our research reveals that a series of problems of Greek education in general are reflected in the questions around LS, and especially agency: centralization, teacher-centredness, lack of participation of parents and the community, discontinuity.

Concluding remarks (2): LS and attitudes towards migration, agency and educational policy

- Language policy and precisely the absence of migrant languages from the curriculum explains the reluctance of actors to take the initiative for providing multilingual information, and for constructing multilingual LS.
- Educational policy determines agency, use of the curriculum and approved textbooks, teaching methods. The gap of precise instructions regarding multilingual LS leaves space for initiatives; nevertheless, they appear sparsely.
- General policy towards migration plays an important part, too. With the change of Greek Government after the elections in 2019, the number of schools with multilingual LS reduced drastically, as well as voluntary teaching of migrant and refugee languages, and other multilingual practices.

Σας ευχαριστώ πολύ
Je vous remercie beaucoup
faleminderit

Danke

Спасибо

хвала

Благодарности

謝謝

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Gracias

Many thanks

