

Albanians thinking “Greek”. Language acquisition within acculturation process for second-generation Albanians in Greece

Themistokles Gogas

Epirus Institute of Technology
themistokles.gogas@education.lu

Abstract:The last years in Greece second generation immigrants who study at Greek schools use Greek language fluently and in many cases they speak Greek in such a proficiency that are not recognizable as non-Greeks. Primarily this means that these individuals master the mechanism of *parole*. Moreover, these persons meet the demands of education, which signifies the mastering of *langue*. In a secondary level of approach the question arising is whether the structural elements of *langue* i.e. the archetypes corresponding to abstract notions are similar to those of the greek native speakers. Considering that young Greeks acquire the ‘greek’ meaning of a word, the research is focused on the examination of the way young immigrants acquire the meanings of words. More specifically, which way young immigrants perceive abstract meanings? In their own linguistic frame or through dominant language? In other words, I shall approach the production of *langue* in its base, i.e. in the level of the abstract notions.

1. Introductory note

The story goes back to 1946. In his *Clear Thinking*, Jepson argued:

If you translate the English word into the Russian word *demokraticesky*, you are, linguistically speaking, translating with perfect accuracy, but you are not, in fact, conveying meaning any more than you would be conveying meaning by using the word 'large' to describe a large inkpot or a large railway station. To us who have been trained in the Liberal tradition of some three hundred years, democracy implies the fundamentals of personal liberty.[...] But to the Russians, all these things which seem to us so precious and so essential are no more than outmoded bourgeois inhibitions. To them 'democracy' implies the classless state in which the means of production are owned in common.

Despite the obvious Cold-War logic of this statement, one has to admit the apparent: the social, political, economic or cultural context within which a word acquires its meaning. Susan Gal (1987) worked on this field and examined bilingual minorities. Her approach is focused on abstract notions on domination or subordination within their historical and politico-economic context. On a similar work, Maxwell (2004) examines the ‘Magyarization’ in Hungarian, German and Slovak languages under the Whorfian hypothesis. He concludes to the importance of political realm in the formation of the word’s meaning. A study of Moschonas (2004) on Greek language reveals the ideological trends in a metalinguistic discourse. He also concludes to the significance of political domain in the formation of language.

2. Theoretical frame

The conceptual construction of an individual about the world is based upon his/her language. Hence, young persons acquire the meanings of the words of their ‘mother tongue’ thanks to their living experience within the limits of their linguistic (and national) community. Focal point of this paper is the different way the world is perceived by users of different languages, for as Wardhaugh (1992: 220) states: “you perceive only what your language allows you, or predisposes you to perceive. Your language controls your ‘world-view’. Speakers of different languages will, therefore, have different views”. However, this principle cannot apply to the same extend in cases of immigrant communities. The young members of an immigrant community are exposed to both: the linguistic environment of their mother tongue, as well as to that of the dominant language. Which language is the decisive, i.e. that who will facilitate a specific individual to form his/her worldview?

Starting from the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis (LRH) given by Whorf (1956) language, thought and culture are interconnected. Stubbs (1997: 372) argued that “[m]uch of the puzzle posed by Whorf and others remains unresolved: it is particularly difficult to escape the circularity of arguments where language is both cause and evidence”. This peculiarity enables only approaches dealing with the socio-cultural dimensions of language (Risager, 2006), or the mechanism that creates stereotypes or assumptions (Johnson, 1972). Also, it is important to be noted here the criticism on LRH, along with hints on racism of such

statements (Stubbs, 1997: 361). "If Aristotle had spoken Nootka (an American Indian language) then we would have different logic". This statement is just an argument in the deployment of Stubbs' (op.cit.: 359) criticism on Whorfian hypothesis, and it is followed by a counter-argument: bilinguals speak different languages but they do not perceive the world differently. Bilingualism raises the issue of cultural dominance over language. In particular, in case of immigrant communities the acculturation process plays an important role in the perception of language.

The term *acculturation* refers to the process of cultural contact as well as the outcome of this contact (Redfield, Linton & Herskovits, 1936: 149; Berry & Sam, 1997: 293-294; Padilla & Perez, 2003; Baldwin, Longhurst, McCracken, Ogborn, & Smith, 2004: 45). Acculturation has been studied extensively mostly in the West, since the long period of de-colonisation led researchers to investigate the adaptation of the indigenous people to the dominant culture (Hallowell, 1945; Cheung-Blunden & Juang, 2008). Additionally, western societies after the end of the 'period of nationalism' experienced a massive flow of immigrants, a phenomenon which ignited several researches. At this period (1990 and forth) the interesting of the research has been focused on the changes occurred in the immigrants' culture and the process to be adapted to the culture of the local (dominant) (Beiser, 2000).

Berry (2003: 19) spots the major problems of acculturation on the definition of the term itself. Also, the measurement process and the consequences it may cause on the formation of policy. He argues that major problems of acculturation are: whether acculturation influences all groups who are in contact (irrespective of their social or political status) and ii) if acculturation is an individual procedure or it takes place within larger groups.

3. The research

In Greece at present lives a considerable number of immigrants. To a certain extent the second generation of them has been fully integrated into Greek schools. In most cases teachers are not in position to understand whether a pupil is immigrant or not. This is due to the perfect use of Greek language they possess (oral and written). Examining these cases, my initial question deals with the levels of Greek language they possess: definitely vocabulary, grammar and syntax are equivalent to mother tongue. The question is whether they 'think Greek or not'. This means not merely the composition of thoughts in the 'Greek way', but additionally the structure of the abstract notions not in their mother tongue, but according to the Greek patterns.

Counter to what Woolard (1985) argues, I made the hypothesis that the cultural hegemony of the dominant language remains unchallenged if (and only if) hegemony applies on the social corpus through education.

3.1. Methodology

The research was based on Hoffstaetter's (1957) work. In this, Hofstaetter measured the psychological equivalence of abstract words on Americans and Germans. He concluded that an abstract word is perceived different by both groups. Consequently, the perception of the world has to be different. Hence, there is a gap between the psychological and the lexical correspondence when switching from one language to the other. In his research, Hofstaetter developed a tool in order to measure the impact of each word upon Americans and Germans. The individuals were given the word *loneliness* and asked to describe it according to a chart. In the present research, I implemented Hoffstaetter's method, asking the subjects to describe the word *loneliness*.

Population of the research are the Albanian immigrants of Greece, for they possess certain attributes facilitating sampling: they are the most numerous minority group; they are scattered all over Greece; most of them live in Greece since early 90s and are well accustomed to researches; and they pay specific attention to the education of their children. The research has been conducted during the academic year 2009-2010 and took place at the same time in Greece and Albania with the assistance of students of the Department of Applied Foreign Languages.

3.1.1. Sample

The sample has been chosen through random selection. Thus subject's groups were:

Control Group 1 (CG1): Native adult Greeks, who were born in Greece, studied in Greek schools and have never been exposed to foreign linguistic environment.

Control Group 2 (CG2): Native adult Albanians, who were born in Albania, studied in Albanian schools and have never been exposed to foreign linguistic environment.

Experimental Group (EG): Young persons of Albanian origin who were born in Greece, completed their compulsory education in Greek schools and study at present at Greek tertiary education institutions.

The student-assistants distributed a large amount of questionnaires, while CG1 responded properly on 134 questionnaires, CG2 on 98 and EG on 87. Specific attention has been paid for the exclusion of those subjects who derive from mixed marriages or those who come from the Greek Minority of South Albania.

3.1.2. Tool

Research tool has been selected the bipolar set of opposite qualities as given by Hofstaetter. This is based on a set of 24 bipolar attributes a word may possess. The pairs of antithetic qualities were placed on the two edges of a 10-scale chart.

Below is given an example of two pairs of antithetic qualities (black-white and small-big).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Black											White

The subject has to 'tick' the position on which s/he believed the quality matches the notion. Thus in the antithetic pair "black-white" ticking 1 means the subject believes that 'loneliness' is totally black, 5 means is grayish, while 10 means that loneliness is totally white.

The results were categorized and summed up on the chart for each one of the 3 groups. Purpose of the research was to sketch the way the word in question is perceived. It was taken for granted that adult Greeks and Albanians would provide the average 'national sketch', while the results of the experimental group had to give the answer to which 'national sketch' resembles the sketch of the young Albanian students.

The results have been elaborated statistically: normalization of the sample, extraction of average and implementation of Pearson correlation for each pair of groups (CG1-EG; CG2-EG and CG1-EG).

3.2. Findings

The answers given by the subjects were normalized, due to the different size of the sample. In Table 1 below are given the average scores for each antithetic pair for each group before the normalization (BN) and after (AN).

Studying the results taken out of the antithetical pairs, one may see that for both people (i.e. for CG1 and CG2) loneliness is something big, strong, ill, sad, deep, bad, cold, abrasive, wild and old "thing".

Table 1: Average scores per pair of groups before and after normalization

	CG1		CG2		EG		
	BN	AN	BN	AN	BN	AN	
Small	96.5	0,72015	73	0,7449	60.6	0,69655	Big
Weak	96.5	0,75373	68.2	0,69592	65.9	0,75747	Strong
Ill	46.6	0,34776	34.9	0,35612	30.7	0,35287	Healthy
Lucid	95.8	0,71493	62.7	0,6398	57.2	0,65747	Blurry
Coward	52.9	0,39478	72.8	0,74286	36.3	0,41724	Daring
Empty	50.8	0,3791	50.1	0,51122	33.9	0,38966	Full
Sad	36.5	0,27293	34.8	0,3551	34.5	0,39655	Cheerful
Shallow	94	0,70149	71.3	0,72755	61.1	0,7023	Deep
Good	105.5	0,78731	77.6	0,79184	69.8	0,8023	Bad
Quiet	58	0,43284	66.8	0,68163	35.2	0,4046	Loud
Fresh	86.3	0,64403	70.6	0,72041	66	0,75862	Moldy
Nice	101.1	0,75448	72.4	0,73878	68	0,78161	Ugly
Tense	67.2	0,50149	41.1	0,41939	46.3	0,53281	Calm
Angular	71.2	0,53134	41.6	0,42449	47	0,54023	Round
Energetic	93.6	0,69851	40.4	0,41224	48.7	0,55977	Passive
Cold	35.1	0,26194	40.5	0,41327	29.8	0,34253	Warm
Abrasive	41.2	0,30746	36.8	0,37551	33.5	0,38506	Gentle
Benign	100.9	0,75299	70.8	0,72245	61.2	0,70345	Ferocious
Near	81	0,60448	53.7	0,54796	63.1	0,72529	Distant
Liberal	74.3	0,55448	72	0,73459	52	0,5977	conservative
Tall	77.2	0,57612	67.3	0,68673	49.2	0,56552	Short
Humid	81.8	0,61045	64.4	0,65714	48.1	0,55287	Drought
Unstable	55.8	0,41642	65.9	0,67245	32.4	0,37241	Stable
Young	99.7	0,74403	66.6	0,67959	64.3	0,73908	Old

Unsurprisingly the EG the description matches the case. The difference is spotted on a series of attributes for which CG1 and CG2 present significant differences. Thus, Greeks believe that *loneliness* is coward, empty, energetic, distant and unstable, while Albanians think of something brave, full, pathetic, near and stable. Surprisingly the young Albanian students think of loneliness the greek way! Prima facie Albanian student experience loneliness in a 'greek way'. Applying Pearson correlation, the results are as on Table 2.

Obviously on pairs 5, 6, 10, 19, 20 and 23 CG1-EG appear similarities. On the contrary CG1-CG2 and CG2-EG present significant difference. To a lesser extend on pairs 4, 13, 14, 15, 21 and 22 CG1-EG exist similarities, while CG2-EG present difference or are antithetical. There is only one pair (No 11) on which CG2-EG present higher significance than CG1-EG, but this cannot alter the overall picture

Table 2. Pearson correlation values for each pair of groups

No		CG1-CG2	CG2- EG	CG1- EG	
1	Small	0,89	0,94	0,83	Big
2	Weak	0,79	0,85	0,73	Strong
3	Ill	0,85	0,78	0,84	Healthy
4	Lucid	0,51	0,47	0,79	Blurr
5	Coward	-0,41	-0,13	0,74	Daring
6	Empty	-0,18	-0,25	0,88	Full
7	Sad	0,86	0,79	0,92	Cheerful
8	Shallow	0,93	0,86	0,89	Deep
9	Good	0,91	0,93	0,97	Bad
10	Quiet	-0,04	-0,36	0,78	Loud
11	Fresh	0,47	0,92	0,31	Moldy
12	Nice	0,94	0,98	0,96	Ugly
13	Tense	0,26	0,17	0,45	Calm
14	Angular	0,31	-0,06	0,59	Round
15	Energetic	-0,53	-0,34	-0,05	Passive
16	Cold	0,87	0,81	0,93	Warm
17	Abrasive	0,94	0,80	0,74	Gentle
18	Benign	0,93	0,91	0,95	Ferocious
19	Near	-0,01	0,09	0,08	Distant
20	Liberal	-0,12	-0,20	0,61	Conservative
21	Tall	0,03	-0,21	0,54	Short
22	Humid	0,44	-0,33	0,36	Drought
23	Unstable	-0,48	-0,47	0,77	Stable
24	Young	0,79	0,78	0,85	Old

4. Conclusions

The word 'loneliness' is not merely a conventional symbol, but it possess a particular psychological 'gravity'. The perception of this particular word takes place through a gradual socializing process within a specific cultural and linguistic community. Thus, young Greeks acquire the 'greek' vision of loneliness to the extend that young Albanians get the vision of their own socio-cultural group. In tha case under investigation, young Albanians born and bread in Greece are exposed to a dual socio-cultural environment: the maternal and the 'dominant'.

The particularity of the case has to do with the subjects of the experimental group, who sompleted primary and secondary education in Greek schools and continue their studies in Greek tertiary academic institutions.

Dittmar's (1976, p. 238) position describes the dialectic process within which linguistic and social behavior exist. In that sense, there is a continuous interaction, while material conditions are crucial factor for the formation of both behavioral aspects. The school is a major domain where social behavior is imposed in a

hegemonic way. Hence, the linguistic patterns are dictated, dominating the subject and formatting his/her linguistic boundaries.

The research aimed to reveal the particular power of the education through the process of acculturation in the formation of one's linguistic perception. Indeed, education socializes individuals according to the norms of the dominant socio-political, cultural and linguistic group. For Bourdieu (1976: 194) "Culture is not merely a common code or even a catalogue of answers to recurring problems; it is a common set of previously assimilated master patterns from which, by an 'art of invention' similar to that involved in the writing of music, an infinite number of individual patterns directly applicable to specific situations are generated". Education participates in this process turning the cultural patterns of the individual in order to conform with the dominant. As it seems in the present research the power of education is not limited on cognitive, behavioral or ideological matters, but it goes deeper, to the level of the construction of abstract notions. Remembering Anderson's (1991) *Imagined Communities*, Latin, in late-medieval period was a language spoken by just a few. He assumes that even fewer would have used Latin in their dreams. The final question of the present is: the youngsters of the Experimental Group in which language do they dream?

References

- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso.
- Beiser, M. (2000). *Strangers at the gate*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Berry, J.W. & Sam, D.L. (1997). Acculturation and Adaptation. In J.W. Berry, M.H. Segall & C. Kagitcibasi (eds.) *Handbook of cross-cultural psychology*, Vol. 3, (pp. 291-326). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Berry, J.W. (2003). Conceptual approaches to acculturation. In G. Marin, P. Balls- Organista & K. M. Chung, & (eds) *Acculturation: Advances in Theory, Measurement and Applied Research*, (pp. 17-37). Washington: American Psychological Association.
- Bourdieu, P. (1976). Systems of education and systems of thought. In R. Dale, G. Esland & M. MacDonald (eds.) *Schooling and Capitalism* (pp. 192-200). London: RKP.
- Cheung-Blunden, V.L. & Juang, L. (2008). Expanding acculturation theory: Are acculturation models and the adaptiveness of acculturation strategies generalizable in a colonial context?. *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 32(1): 21-33.
- Dittmar, N. (1976). *Sociolinguistics: A Critical Survey of Theory and Application*, London: Arnold.
- Gal, S. (1987). Codeswitching and Consciousness in the European periphery. *American Ethnologist*, 14(4): 637-653.
- Hallowell, A.I., (1945). Sociopsychological Aspects of acculturation. In R. Lindon (ed.) *The science of man in the world crisis* (310-332). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hofstaetter, P.R. (1957). *Gruppendynamik*, Hamburg: Rowohlt.
- Jepson, R.W. (1946). *Clear Thinking*, London: Longmans Green.
- Johnson, W. (1972). The communication process and general semantic principles. In W. Shramm (ed.) *Mass Communication*, (pp. 301-345). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

*1st International Conference on Foreign Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics
May 5-7 2011 Sarajevo*

- Maxwell, A. (2004). Magyarization, language planning, and Whorf: The word *uhor* as a case study in linguistic relativism. *Multilingua* 23: 319-337.
- Moschonas, S.A. (2004). Relativism in Language Ideology: On Greece's Latest Language Issue. *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 22(2): 173-206.
- Padilla, A. & Perez, W. (2003). Acculturation, Social identity, and Social Cognition: A New Perspective. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 25(1), pp. 35-55.
- Redfield, R., Linton, R. & Herskovits, M. (1936). Memorandum on the study of acculturation. *American Anthropologist*, 38, pp. 149-152.
- Risager, K. (2006). *Language and Culture: Global Flows and Local Complexity*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters LTD.
- Stubbs, M. (1997). Language and the Mediation of Experience: Linguistic representation and Cognitive Orientation. In F. Coulmas (ed.) *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics* (pp. 359-373). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Tabouret – Keller, A. (1998). Language and Identity. In Fl. Coulmas (ed.) *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics* (pp. 315-326). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wardhaugh, R. (1992). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, 2nd ed, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Whorf, B.L. (1956). *Language, thought and reality, Essays by B.L. Whorf*. In J.B. Carroll (ed.), Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Woolard, K. (1985). Language Variations and Cultural Hegemony: Toward Integration of Sociolinguistic and Social theory. *American Ethnologist* 12(4): 738-748.