

The Greek Language as a Foreign Language: “Playing... With the Language, Playing... for the Language”

Zoi Toliopoulou

(Luxembourg/Commune Greek language School of Leuven, Brussels, Belgium)

Abstract: The communicative dimension of language, which prevailed in the “New” School, is strengthened — and it should so — in the context of a school of multicultural awareness and learning, that now defines (to some extent) essence of both the modern — but absolutely monolingual — Greek school and monolingual or multilingual foreign language schools of other European countries. Thus, students with different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds in the Greek school, as Greek students abroad too, aim to learn Greek as a second or — mostly — as a foreign language in a school educational process that necessarily follows the developments of today’s society. The purpose of this presentation is to expound a didactic genre-based approach (task-based) proposal in teaching of modern Greek as a foreign language at level A2. This didactic scenario aims at the possibility of socially now identified students to meet daily communication needs, in short, to meet the absolutely necessary daily communication (personal information, daily needs, family, entertainment).

Key words: second/foreign language, multiliteracies, task-based learning, social identities

1. Introduction

The didactic approach of language which for many decades aimed exclusively at handling a grammatical “metaglossa”, is now acquiring a communicative dimension. This teaching discourse undoubtedly “infiltrates” — apart from the first (L1-mother) — in teaching of the second (L2) or foreign (FL) language. The second language (L2) is carried out through interacting with other elements “true” texts which the students-citizens of modern society meet every day in their “out of school” life. Thus, students play a leading role in the classroom, understand, interpret alternating meanings and then, in addition, they re-construct meanings, ready to vigorously challenge them at any time (Baynham, 2002; Mitsikopoulou, 2001).

2. The (Greek) Language as a Foreign Language

The socialization and the formation of an individual’s identity is achieved by learning the language, both as a mother tongue (exposure to the indigenous language environment, teaching at school, etc.) and as a second/foreign. However, the Greek student abroad often faces problems when she is asked to define her mother tongue — which is the primary and often the only tool of family communication (family language) — not as a second, but as a foreign language, since the school in which she attends is either purely monolingual foreign language and/or multilingual,

Zoi Toliopoulou, MSc, Ed., Commune Greek Language School of Leuven; research areas: language teaching and Greek as second/foreign language. E-mail: zoi_toliopoulou@hotmail.com.

without, however, Greek taking place in it. According to Cook’s definition, “foreign language” is defined as language that is deprived of its natural language environment and is taught in a classroom, without the possibility of its physical use for communicative purposes in the individual’s daily life (Cook, 2016).

Within Hellenism abroad, the main concern of learning Greek is to contribute to the development of the capabilities of the individual who participates in it, as well as to help her build an identity, “in accordance” with the context of her socialization. Moreover, through learning Greek, the communities of Hellenes Abroad cultivate and build relationships each other and with the country of origin (dual character of Greek language education) (Damanakis, 2007, pp. 208–209).

Greek (FL) as a single system with a structural - functional character (structure and use of language) is a cultural asset for the Hellenism of the Diaspora, conveying messages on a symbolic level and consolidating the ethnocultural identity.

Language, as an interactive product in the classroom, becomes a channel of communication that does not take place in isolated words and sentences. The student coming in contact with different text types (genre) expresses a critical perception, changing the protagonist of the linguistic interaction. According to Damanakis (2004, p. 87), language (L1, L2, FL) is acquired through “really” texts (texts with direct speech such as dialogues, telephone conversations which are closely related to the environment and the experiences of the students), non-literary texts (descriptive, informative, advertisements), through which the students communicate with the real world and the culture that surrounds them) and literary texts (prose, poetic, theatrical). In modern language education, all language activities and exercises of any type inextricably linked to the texts to be read, now refer to them (Functional Use of language).

By using and processing multiple pieces of information, students’ reading ability is promoted, forming the foundation for their future progress and their academic career. Initially, the student, digging emerged knowledge and ways of learning from her mother tongue (L1), extracts meaning. With increasing ease she reads the written verbal or non-hybrid many times — text, edits it phonologically and orthographically so as a result she comprehends it. In the long run, she passes steadily and gradually into metacognition, eventually reaching to develop socially defined strategies for how she learns (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990). Thus, the student, acquiring an active role in the teaching practice, mediates, communicates and challenges strongly (Dinas & Chlapoutaki, 2013). In short, the student is characterized as critically literate.

3. Research Methodology and Material

The purpose of this teaching proposal is the essential contact of Greek (and non) Greek students with Greek as a foreign language (level A2.2-B1), so that, as some independent users, they can functionally cope with everyday simple but so important activities both in in-school and out-of-school environment. Also, this research is directed to the engagement with the functional use of language that sets aside, without abandoning its regulatory principles (language structure), but giving an interactive dimension to teaching process.

The proposed lesson plan defines Greek as a target language for students abroad who are invited to participate in the school teaching process with a school language other than Greek, a process in which Greek is often taught neither as a second nor as a foreign language in formal compulsory education. Therefore, the former (Greek) mother tongue is transformed into a foreign language that will be taught mainly in the context of non-formal language education. Twelve to sixteen teaching hours are suggested as an indicative duration. The proposal is predominantly

oriented to the student-centered model of teaching with individual and group (cooperative) work of students and techniques that follow the specifications of KEPA (1991).

The description of the learning goals that are developed, is made by utilizing terms of development of communicative language skills (communicative approach), since they are needed for a student in order to respond and communicate within a certain environment and a communication circumstance (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980; Council of Europe, 2000).

In the context of communicative-genre approach in language teaching (genre-based learning), the axis of this didactic proposal around which all the activities unfold, is an improvised modular story, understandable by children (9–12 years old). The story has variety narrative ways and techniques (description, narration, dialogue), in which individual original texts are boxed (ad, letter, instructions). Of course, multimodal texts with images and the use of audio files (announcement) also have a place. This is because these two cases correspond to authentic communication circumstances (Hatzisavvidis, 2011). A variety of text types are presented both at the level of supply (teaching material to be studied) and demand through the production of students’ oral and written speech. All activities are directly related to the original and the individual texts; they were created based on them and refer to them.

This is how we talk about communication activities that are starring present in the entire teaching proposal. Even the previously traditional type of exercises of structure (morphology and syntax, vocabulary, meaning), closed type exercises which are certainly not missing, are given as a continuation of the texts and not in individual examples. There are equally oral and written speech exercises of all types (closed/open type, referential questions, comprehension and speech production questions) and all are of graded difficulty. The exercises aim at acquiring all the cognitive skills (comprehension and production of oral and written speech) that are often intertwined in the same exercise. The wordings of the exercises/activities are given in a direct, communicative and precise way, using the first and second person in verbs. At the end, the teaching proposal presents a series of repetitive exercises.

4. Results: Conclusions

This didactic proposal gives an alternative action to the young students who live/grow in foreign language environments and treat Greek as foreign language.

It is an imaginative teaching scenario in which the student plays, interacts, learns and creates.

The student realizes that learning a foreign language (or first language, too), doesn’t learn grammatical rules individually, she absolutely has a contact with different types of texts that she encounters in his daily life, and she is obliged to manage effectively. The teaching scenario inevitably pushes the student to read again and again the various texts (letters, announcements, advertisements, descriptions), cultivating her reading ability, because only then she can answer the exercises. Dealing with the texts, keeps notes/subtitles and she also repeats and thickens the speech. In other words, she devotes time to understanding what is given to her for analysis.

Images and audio messages are also present, contributing to the understanding of written and spoken language. The student comprehends and acquires - to any degree - metacognitive and “meta-language” dynamics.

The activities, with escalating difficulty, smoothly move the student to produce her own oral speech (production of a sentence, short conversation/telephone dialogue, instructions, controversy/debate), as well as the production of written speech (referential type answers, copy, descriptions, announcement, letter).

The student uniquely produces her own language product.

Often, the same exercise requires the acquisition of more and/or all cognitive skills.

The aim and result of this didactic proposal is the acquisition of social skills of the students — societies of the in-school and out-of-school everyday life (in the context of what is possible for this level of language learning).

References

- Archakis A. (2005). *Language Teaching and Composition of Texts*, Athens: Patakis
- Baynham M. (2002). *Literacy Practices*, Mt. M. Arapopoulou, Athens: Metaichmio.
- Canale M. and Swain M. (1980). “Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing”, *Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 1, pp. 1–47.
- Chatzisavvidis S. (2011). “Language teaching continuous and discontinuous of the last thirty years”, accessed on 22.6.2021, available online at: http://www.pi.ac.cy/pi/files/epimorfosi/analytika/epimorf/nea_ellinika/apo_epikoinoniokentrismo_ston_koinoniokentrismo.pdf.
- Cook V. (2016). *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching*, Routledge.
- Damanakis M. (2004). “Theoretical framework and curricula for Greek language education in the diaspora”, Rethymno: E.ΔΙΑ.Μ.ΜΕ, accessed on 25. 5. 2021, available online at: http://www.ediamme.edc.uoc.gr/diaspora/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=230:2014-06-29144545&catid=137&Itemid=656&lang=en.
- Damanakis M. (2007). *Identities and Education in the Diaspora*, Athens: Gutenberg.
- Dinas K. (2013). “Linguistic diversity in the context of critical literacy pedagogy”, in: N. Tsitsanoudi-Mallidi (Ed.), *Language and Modern (Primary) School Education: Current Challenges and Perspectives*, Athens: Gutenberg, pp. 265–303.
- Dinas K. and Chlapoutaki E. (2013). “Critical literacy pedagogical practices in adolescent students”, in: *The Panhellenic Conference: Critical Literacy in School Practice*, Drama.
- Georgakopoulou A. and Goutsos D. (1999). *Text and Communication*, Athens: Greek Letters.
- Goutsos D. (2006). *Vocabulary Development: From Basic to Advanced Level*, Sifianou.
- Hymes D. H. (1972). “On communicative competence”, in: J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics*, Selected Readings, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Iordanidou A. and M. Pantazara (2010). *I Build Words. How Modern Greek Words Are Formed*, Athens: Kontyli.
- Mitsikopoulou V. (2001). “Literacy”, in: A. F. Christidis (Ed.), *Encyclopedic Guide for Language*, Thessaloniki: KEP.
- O’Malley J. M. and Chamot A. U. (1990). *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Papageorgiou S. (2008). *Matching the Levels of the Certificate of Adequacy of Greek Proficiency with the Levels of the Common European Framework of Reference: Final Report of the Program 7*, Thessaloniki: KEG.