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Language Assessment in a Multilingual Context –Attaining Standards, Sustaining Diversity

Proficiency in Greek of the children attending Greek-Turkish bilingual minority schools of Western Thrace

By

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1. Educational reform programs for minorities residing in Greece

In this talk I will present in fairly broad lines a language research project for the assessment of proficiency in Greek of the children belonging to the Muslim minority of Western Thrace. This research was conducted within a large-scale educational reform program financed by the Ministry of Education and the EU, and ran by the University of Athens. The reform program was initiated in 1995 and its purpose was to improve teaching and learning in the Greek-Turkish bilingual minority schools of Western Thrace.

Politically, the 80s and 90s were marked by the mobilization of different religious and ethnic minority groups in Europe and the subsequent call into question of the existing national borders, especially in the Balkans. In this political climate, Greece also started to revise its policy vis-à-vis minority groups. Thus, a series of initiatives were put into place in order to promote the integration of minority groups in Greek society. In this context, educational reform was set high in the agenda. Educational practice had shown that inadequate knowledge of Greek and ineffective and outdated educational methods and teaching materials were to a large extent responsible for educational underachievement and the subsequent marginalization of minority groups in Greek society at large.

It is against this background that the reform program entitled ‘The Education of the Muslim Minority Children in Western Thrace’ should be considered. The specific language research sub-project that I will present today is only a small part of this extensive reform program, which included the following initiatives: to replace the existing teaching materials with new ones appropriate for second language teaching for all courses taught in Greek, to provide in-service training to teachers on issues concerning bilingual education, to train them in the appropriate use of the new teaching materials and, last but not least, to kick-start a long overdue debate concerning rather sensitive, almost taboo issues in Greek society, such as nationalistic attitudes, social discrimination and intolerance towards minority groups.

At this point it is necessary to draw a profile of the Muslim minority in Thrace, in terms of its historical trajectories, sociolinguistic characteristics and educational realities.

2. Historical trajectories and sociolinguistic realities

The children attending Greek-Turkish bilingual schools belong to the Greek Muslim minority of Western Thrace. This is regarded as an indigenous religious minority whose origins can be traced back to the

Ottoman conquest of the region (1354-1915). During that period, various Muslim ethno-linguistic groups moved from Anatolia and settled in the fertile plains of Thrace along with a substantial military and bureaucratic apparatus, which settled in its urban centres.

The present legal status as well as the linguistic, cultural, educational and religious rights of the Greek Muslim minority are recognized and protected by the 1923 Lausanne Treaty. This was an international treaty signed by Greece and Turkey in the aftermath of the defeat of the Greek army by nationalist Turkish forces in 1922 in Asia Minor/Anatolia (Turkey). Known as the Asia Minor Catastrophe by the Greeks and War of Independence by the Turks, this culminated in the dismantling of the multiethnic Ottoman Empire, the establishment of the new Turkish Republic and the subsequent forced displacement of peoples on both sides of the Aegean. Indeed, the Lausanne Convention stipulated the first internationally ratified compulsory population exchange between two countries, based on the premise of promoting the establishment of ideally homogeneous nation-states. Nearly 400,000 Muslims and well over a million Christians were affected. Exempted from the exchange was 1/3 of the Orthodox Greek population of Constantinople/Istanbul and the islands of Imvros and Tenedos (numbering about 100,000) and an equivalent number of Muslims in Western Thrace. In this respect, religious (rather than linguistic or ethnic) affiliation was the defining identity marker for the population exchange.

The exempted Muslims in Western Thrace included the Muslims of Turkish descent as well as Muslims of Slavic descent (Pomaks) and Roma descent. The Pomaks were Islamized during the 16th-17th centuries. Their home language is Pomak, a primarily oral Slavic variety containing lexical influences from both Greek and Turkish.

Although research on the Roma in Greece is still scant, it appears that the Roma settled in Thrace during the Byzantine era (around the 11th century). Similar to the Pomaks, they seemed to have been Islamized during Ottoman rule. The home language of the overwhelming majority of the Roma of Greece is Greek Romany.

It should be noted, however, that over the past 20 years, Turkish seems to have developed as the *lingua franca* of the minority in Thrace. This has led to various degrees of Pomak-Turkish and Romany-Turkish bilingualism as well as instances of language change to Turkish, especially among the urban Pomak and Roma populations.

As it becomes evident, the Greek Muslim minority is ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse and its members have different historical trajectories.

3. Educational provision

Recent studies dating from the mid-90s repeatedly showed that Greek muslim minority members tended to be geographically isolated, socioeconomically marginalised and educationally disadvantaged vis-à-vis majority Greeks. Moreover, this line of research pointed to the fact that the educational provision in Greek-Turkish bilingual schools reproduced inequalities, social exclusion and educational disadvantage. These studies reported that only a small percentage of minority children successfully completed secondary education and an even smaller one moved on to tertiary education in Greek Universities.

Educational provision for members of the Greek Muslim minority is determined by the relevant educational clauses in the Lausanne Treaty (1923) and a series of bilateral Educational Protocols signed between Greece and Turkey. All minority schools (around 300 primary schools, 2 secondary schools and 2 religious seminaries) use Modern Greek and Standard Modern Turkish as languages of instruction. Bilingual schools follow a bilingual curriculum according to which half of the lessons are taught in Greek and the other half in Turkish. It is worth noting that from the mid-90s onwards, an increasing number of parents choose to send their children to Greek-medium mainstream kindergartens, primary and/or secondary schools.

Bilingual educational provision was put in place with the purpose of safeguarding the educational rights of all Greek Muslim minority children regardless of ethno-linguistic background. Two significant problems have arisen, however, since its inception: (1) when starting school, children frequently have no proficiency or very limited proficiency in Greek and (2) by privileging the use of Turkish as language of instruction, Pomak and Romany are marginalized within the educational system. Moreover, the use of Turkish assumes that all children regardless of ethno-linguist background are Turkish-speaking, which is not the case.

4. Assessing proficiency in Greek

Right from the onset of the program ‘The Education of the Muslim Minority Children in Western Thrace’ linguists, teachers and researchers in other fields realized that most educational problems stemmed from children’s low proficiency in Greek. Furthermore, an efficient Greek curriculum was almost impossible to put into practice. Children were placed in a certain class according to their age despite the fact that knowledge of Greek was uneven across the same age group. Moreover, courses in Greek were based on textbooks and the curriculum used in Greek mainstream schools. Thus, they were for the majority of children too difficult to follow.

Proficiency in Greek was influenced – as it is expected - by a variety of factors besides age, such as ethno-linguistic and cultural backgrounds, home language(s), social status, proximity to an urban center, degree of exposure to Greek language, and so on. In addition, more idiosyncratic aspects of a child’s life seemed to play an important role, such as family involvement in the educational process, teacher attitudes, and, last but not least, children’s personality.

These observations, however accurate, remained for the most part fragmented since there were no suitable tools, procedures and data that would allow to measure in an objective way the language proficiency of this population and to draw a systematic correlation between proficiency and various social parameters. Thus, the specific language sub-project entitled “Assessing language proficiency in Greek” was set up in the second phase of the program (2002-2004) in order to establish a clearer picture of the linguistic situation.

The design of the language research project was shaped in order to deal mainly with three matters:

- to develop methods for measuring, on the basis of an objective proficiency scale, children’s knowledge of Greek.
- to provide a basis for a more focused language teaching activity
- to collect in a systematic way linguistic and sociolinguistic data of the process of acquiring Greek as a second language.

Those matters eventually crystallized in a language assessment testing procedure. Tests were set up in order:

- to assess language proficiency in the base of the Common European Framework,
- to diagnose weaknesses in student’s language competence on the basis of various linguistic components – such as grammar, phonology, vocabulary etc - and across different skills, and
- to investigate whether children of the sixth grade of elementary school have the necessary language proficiency to attend secondary schools.

It is clear that the language tests were diagnostic. Their objective was not to examine whether children met the requirements of a single stage of proficiency but to place each child at a certain level in the CEF scale. Therefore, they encompass a range of levels of proficiency, which is crystallized in a variety of tasks of increasing difficulty and complexity.

Tests were supplemented by a questionnaire, whose purpose was to collect data on individual and social factors that could have a bearing on the children’s learning of Greek.

5. Target group and organization of tests

The target group of the language research project was students who attended minority primary schools of Thrace. Primary schools comprise six grades - 1 to 6. Children enter grade 1 at the age of 6 and graduate at the age of 12 or 13. It is worth noting that traditionally parents do not send their children to nursery schools, as they are no Greek-Turkish bilingual kindergartens in Thrace. As a result, the majority of the children begin primary school without having gone through the preliminary phase of pre-school education.

This picture is slowly changing, especially in the urban centers where an increasing number of parents have started sending their children to Greek-medium nursery schools.

Specific characteristics of this target group determined the organization of the test. In this respect two parameters were taken into account.

- Until the age of 12 children's linguistic and cognitive capacities are rapidly developing and have not yet reached their mature stage.
- Knowledge of Greek is uneven across children of the same age

Therefore, tests contain a wide range of tasks designed to correspond to different ages and different levels of proficiency.

6. The tests within the CEF context

As mentioned before the assessment of children's language proficiency was based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The descriptions, nevertheless, contained in this particular proficiency scale pertain to adults and not to young learners. Hence, the scale had to be revised with respect to communicative activities and to cognitive development of children.

The outcome of the relevant adjustments was a five level scale, ranging from A1 to B2. Levels C1 and C2 were not included inasmuch as they pertained clearly to adult activities and skills. Furthermore a preliminary stage was established that corresponded to younger children of the first grade who do not know how to read and write, and, therefore, could not fill up the entire test.

The scale that was developed is shown on the table:

Preliminary Stage

A1

A2

B1

B2

7. Correspondence between tests and levels

Based on the above mentioned proficiency levels of the adapted scale, we designed three different tests. In fact, a single test encompassing five levels would have been too lengthy and time-consuming. Moreover, it could have affected in a negative way both proficient and less proficient test takers. Thus, three tests of increasing difficulty were developed, one for every two grades of the six-grade primary school. These tests

assessed listening comprehension, reading comprehension, writing and grammar. Speaking was assessed through a structured interview comprising questions of increasing difficulty. The interview was common to all levels.

While the four skills were based on the functional driven descriptions of CEF, grammar section is rather tentative. On the one hand its presence in the test seemed necessary for a language like Greek, that is highly inflectional and almost all grammatical functions and categories are reflected in amalgam inflectional morphemes. On the other hand, it is rather difficult to establish a sound correlation between stages of acquisition of grammar with stages of acquisition of communicative functions. Such correlation should be based – under ideal circumstances - on a large number of studies concerning SLA. Unfortunately in our case, only one study was available, which was carried out by one of the members of our group – Spyridoula Varlokosta- and concerns children of Albanian immigrants residing in Athens. Thus, the grammar section was based on that single study, on the new textbooks used from 1998 and onwards in the primary minority schools and on our own insights.

As I said before, three tests were developed, one for every two grades of the six-grade primary school. Each test encompassed a certain range of levels of proficiency.

The correspondence between rating scale and school grades is shown in the table:

Test	Levels
Test 1: Grades 1 – 2	Preliminary Stage – A2
Test 2: Grades 3 – 4	A1 – B1
Test 3: Grades 5 – 6	A2 – B2

8. Correspondence between score and level

The maximum score for each test was 60, 15 for each section of the test (listening, reading comprehension, writing and grammar). These marks were allocated across two or three tasks per section. Every task within each section reflected the specifications of a certain level of proficiency. Each student was placed at a specific level, provided that s/he scored at least half out of the total score corresponding to this level.

For instance, as far as the first test is concerned, a student was placed at the Preliminary Stage if s/he scored between 11 and 30 marks, at the A1 if s/he scored between 31 and 50 marks and at the level A2 if s/he scored between 51 and 60 marks. For all tests, marks ranging from 0 to 10 placed the student outside the scale, since they may be the result of random choice.

Marks	Level
0 - 10	Not rated
11 - 30	Preliminary Stage
31 - 50	A1
51 - 60	A2

9 Test specifications

One of our main concerns in designing the tests was to make them attractive, interesting and enjoyable to children. Thus, test layout was as pictorial as possible. In many respects our work was, to a large measure, inspired by UCLES' tests for young learners.

Different task types alternated throughout the tests, such as MCQ, short answer questions, cloze texts, gap filling, matching, responses to given information and true/false questions. Conversely, certain task types were rejected, when we realized that they were too peculiar to this particular population, for example the tasks of writing words using jumbled letters or completing forms with personal information.

The input given to children of lower levels was supported mainly by pictures. As the level increased, the input consisted mainly of texts, and became less dependent on pictures.

Texts integrated in the tests were selected as to reflect life at school and everyday interactions within the larger society. The majority of them were authentic or semi authentic. Text types, such as formal and informal conversations, instructions, news broadcasts, informal letters, narratives, informational texts such as magazine articles, are included in the tests. In text selection, topics that were deemed as not widely known to minority children (e.g. technology), or topics potentially offensive, for example texts on religion, nationality or cultural particularities, were thoroughly avoided.

The vocabulary used in the tests appears to a large extent in the new primary school textbooks written in the context of the language reform program. In lower proficiency levels a high frequency vocabulary is used, featuring topics on home, school and classroom, animals, family, environment, parts of the body, food and drink, clothes, colors, location and position. In higher levels of proficiency, tests included increasingly lower frequency vocabulary and centered on topics such as means of transportation, time, prices, sports, leisure, weather, culture, space and health.

As far as the communicative functions are concerned the following sequence is adopted: the first test includes functions such as describing and identifying objects, people and colors, carrying out instructions and narrating. The second test includes some of the above functions along with some new functions such as talking about oneself and friends, habits and where one lives. Similarly, in the third test, besides some of the previous functions, children were asked to express preferences, likes and dislikes, to talk about their personal experiences and to express their opinion about a particular topic.

It is worth noting that no time constraints or specific information about the weighting of each task or other marking criteria were given, since test takers were not familiar with the testing procedure.

10. Interview

As we mentioned earlier, speaking was assessed through a structured interview ranging from level A1 to level B2. It included language activities that correspond to the levels of the adapted proficiency scale, so that the evaluation of the children's language production and their placement to levels of language proficiency would be immediate.

The interview also included role playing – such as apologies and requests - in order to assess language proficiency and pragmatic appropriateness in different communicative contexts.

This table shows the structure and the various language activities included in the interview. Each activity corresponds to a certain level of language proficiency.

INTERVIEW STRUCTURE
1. Introduction of examiner to the test taker
2. Narrative game Elicitation of short narrative based on the picture series “horse story” by Maya Hickmann (2003)
3. Description of the place he lives and his close relatives (A1)
4. Description of everyday routines (A1 – A2)
5. Description of school and courses (A2)
6. Narration of events (A2 - B1)

(personal narratives, movie plots)

7. Role playing: Apologies, requests (A1-B2 according to the communicative context)

8. Plans, dreams, ambitions (B1)

9. Hypothetical situations (*what would you do if...?*) (B2)

10. Expression of opinions concerning abstract topics (B1 – B2)

(**Topics:** protection of the environment, comparison of life in the city with life in the country)

During the interview the examiner tried to create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere, so the children would feel comfortable and display the full range of their abilities. This was not particularly easy especially with younger children who were rather shy. But children from 10 to 13 were rather talkative, and, despite the specific set of questions, some of them tried to guide the discussion into topics that were vital to them. For instance, many girls brought the subject of their parents' unwillingness to let them continue their schooling in secondary education. On the whole, it was obvious that older children enjoyed more having the opportunity to chat with an adult than younger children.

The duration of the interview was not determined, but depended on the language proficiency of the child and the activities s/he could perform. All interviews were recorded.

11. Test administration

The testing procedure took place at schools, during school hours. Tests were administered to a representative group of 252 pupils, including children of all ages, boys and girls, pupils from urban areas and villages and pupils having Turkish, Pomak or Romany as their home language. The whole procedure was monitored by the test developers. Out of these 252 pupils, a representative sample of 120 was interviewed.

The tests were also administered to 30 children, native speakers of Greek, who served as the control group.

Overall, minority children appeared willing to participate in the testing procedure. It seemed that this was a pleasant break in their daily routine. Most seemed quite comfortable being interviewed by an adult they did not know. Greek students who also completed the test, on the other hand, seemed to find it too easy. Researchers who administered the tests reported that during the testing procedure children appeared bored

and some of them left the classroom to play in the schoolyard without completing many of the exercises. As for the teacher reactions to the tests, these ranged from indifference to outright hostility, as many suspected that the tests were planned directly by the Ministry of Education, in order to evaluate their performance as teachers.

12. Language assessment results

All scores, except oral interview scores, were introduced item by item to a database, together with some information for each child, taken from the questionnaire. Total scores and classification to levels of proficiency was generated by the database. The scores together with the social and sociolinguistic information included in the database enabled us to investigate the possible connections between levels of proficiency and various social and individual parameters.

At this point I would like to present some of these results.

The first diagram shows the distribution of all children of our sample, regardless of age, in levels of proficiency. The chart displays the overall situation: 61 children were placed out of the scale or at the preliminary stage. The large majority of children is placed at A2 level.

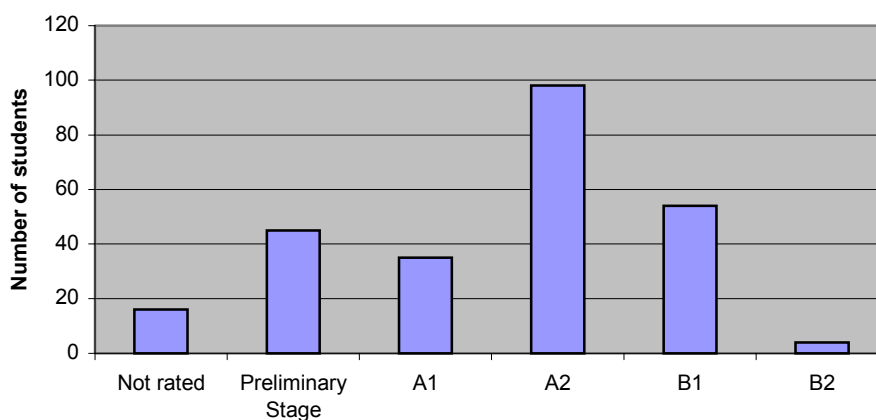


Diagram 1: Overall placement in levels of proficiency

The second diagram shows the distribution of children in proficiency levels within the first test. Let me remind you that the first test was given to children attending the first and second grade (7-8 years).

As we can see, most children were placed at the Preliminary Stage. If we examine the two grades independently one from the other we notice that children of the first grade were placed mainly at the Preliminary Stage since their productive skills as well as their knowledge of grammar of Greek are very limited. With respect to the second grade, the chart shows that half of the students were placed at level A1, while the rest were equally distributed between the Preliminary Stage and A2, which corresponded to the lower and higher level of the first test respectively.

It seems that progress from the first to the second grade reflects the gradual familiarization of the children with the written language.

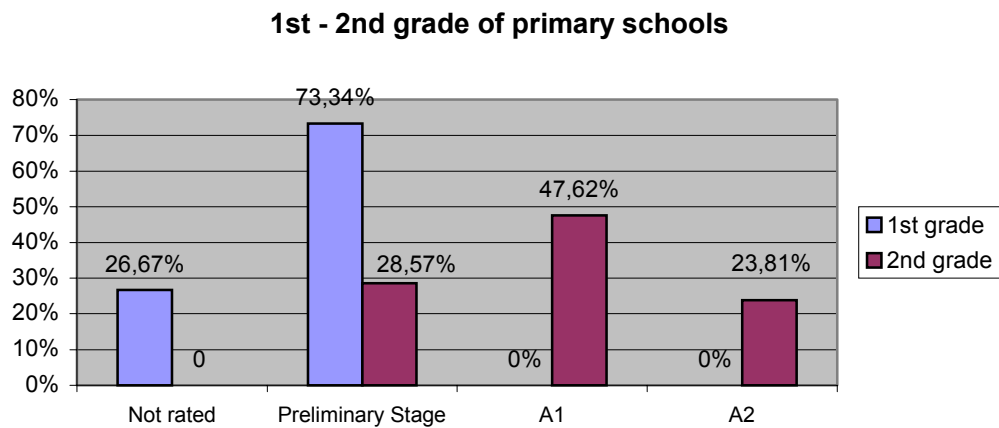


Diagram 2: Placement in levels within test 1 (1st-2nd grade)

The third diagram shows children’s performance in the second test (9-10 years).

The overwhelming majority of students of the third and fourth grade were placed at level A2. As far as students of the third grade were concerned, a clear progress was recorded in comparison to the second grade, since 66% of the students of the 3rd grade reached A2. Steady progress, however, is not maintained in fourth grade, since an extremely high percentage of children remained at A2 level and their proficiency in Greek did not seem to improve in any significant way.

3rd - 4th grade of primary schools

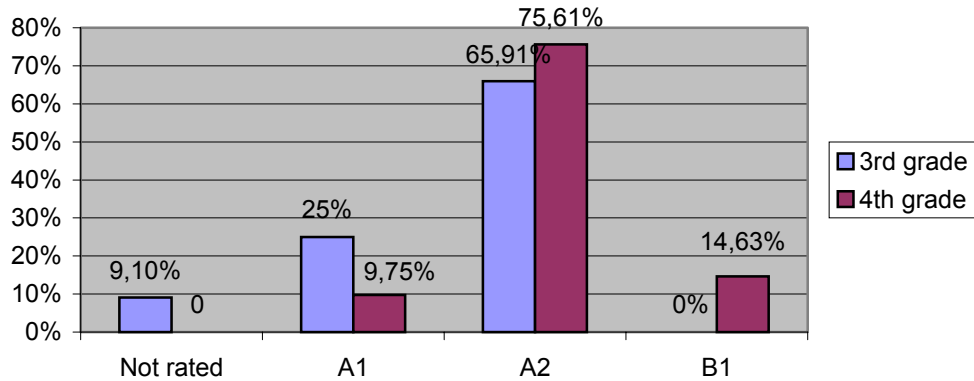


Diagram 3: Placement in levels within test 2 (3rd-4th grade)

As shown in the fourth diagram, children that attended 5th and 6th grades (11-12 years) and took the third test were mainly placed at level B1. However, 40,5% of children attending fifth grade and roughly one third of the children attending sixth grade, appeared to fossilize at level A2. Results show a slight progress from 5th to 6th grade. It is worth noting, however, that the majority of children placed in B1 scored low within this level. They scored less than 38,5 (out of the 60 marks of the test). Accordingly, this is considered as a "low" B1 level. This description converges with the fact that a small percentage of students (in fact four only) were placed at level B2.

5th - 6th grade of primary schools

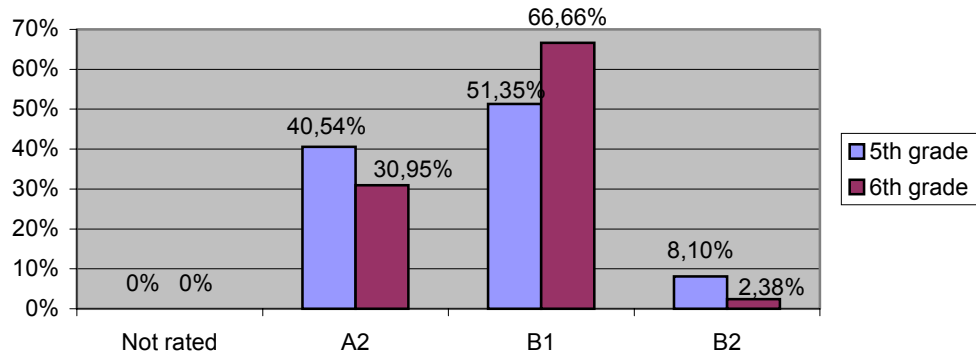


Diagram 4: Placement in levels within test 3 (5th-6th grade)

One of the most striking findings of this research is the extensive variation in language proficiency, recorded between children of the same age. Level A2, for instance, includes a significant number of students of all grades (with the exception of the first). It is clear that this variation of proficiency among children of same age should be taken seriously into account. Ideally children should take a placement test and attend the appropriate class of Greek language, regardless of their age. It should be noted, however, that this line of action can only be carried out in urban centers. In small villages where there is one Greek and one Turkish teacher and children of all ages follow the same course, this is a very distant – if not unrealistic - prospect.

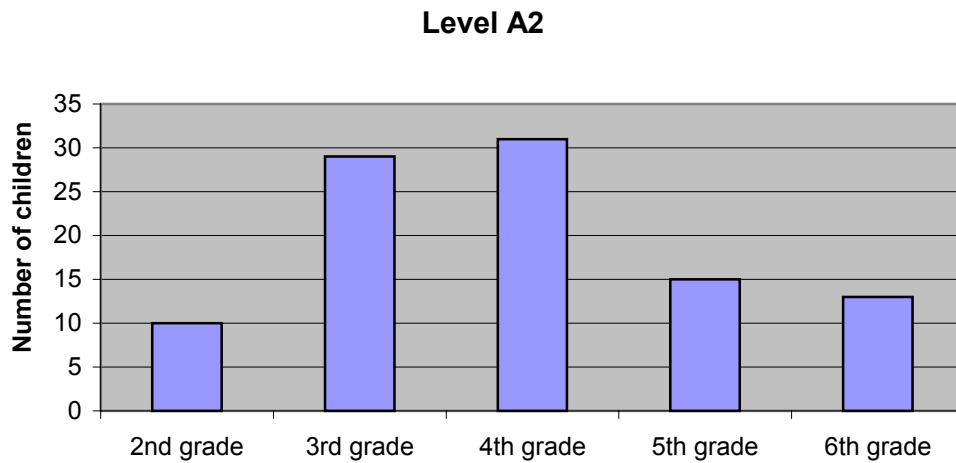


Diagram 5: Distribution of school grades within A2 level

13. Language assessment and testing procedure

It is worth noting that in the process of language assessment some delicate problems for test makers have arisen. On some occasions, it was obvious that poor results did not correspond to a low level of proficiency but were clearly related to the fact that the children were not accustomed to certain testing procedures.

For instance the first listening task of the first test, which was designed to be the easiest, proved hard to be carried out compared to the other two tasks of the listening section. Children of the first and second grade were not acquainted with the task types used for assessing listening and therefore they didn't know what to do despite our explicit instructions. As soon as they familiarized themselves with the procedure of being tested in listening, their performance increased in the subsequent tasks.

A similar problem emerged in the second test where children were asked to participate in a putative prize-winning contest by writing a letter to their favorite magazine. In the instructions they were asked to include information about themselves, their everyday routines, their house, their family and friends. It appeared however that writing to an unknown recipient, such as a magazine for children, was a rather unfamiliar activity to them. Very few children managed to produce a coherent text in the form of a letter. Instead, the large majority responded to the task by providing simple answers to the series of questions, which were given as guidelines. Their inability to perform in this task was reflected in their scores, which were significant lower than the ones in the second writing task of the same test, namely the narrative production.

14. Linguistic proficiency and social factors

As I said before children’s language proficiency was also studied in relation to certain social parameters.

Diagram 6 shows the distribution of proficiency levels in rural and urban settings. The differences between the two groups are significant. Students placed at the Preliminary Stage live mainly in rural areas, whereas children placed at B1 level live mainly in urban areas. This finding is not surprising since in urban settings minority children have more opportunities for contact with majority Greek children and are thus exposed to more input in Greek. Children attending urban schools, for instance, reported having mixed out-of-school friendship groups, attending football clubs and going to swimming and English language lessons with majority Greek peers. In rural areas, on the other hand, contact was more limited, especially since members of the majority and minority tend to live in separate villages.

Proficiency at urban and rural regions

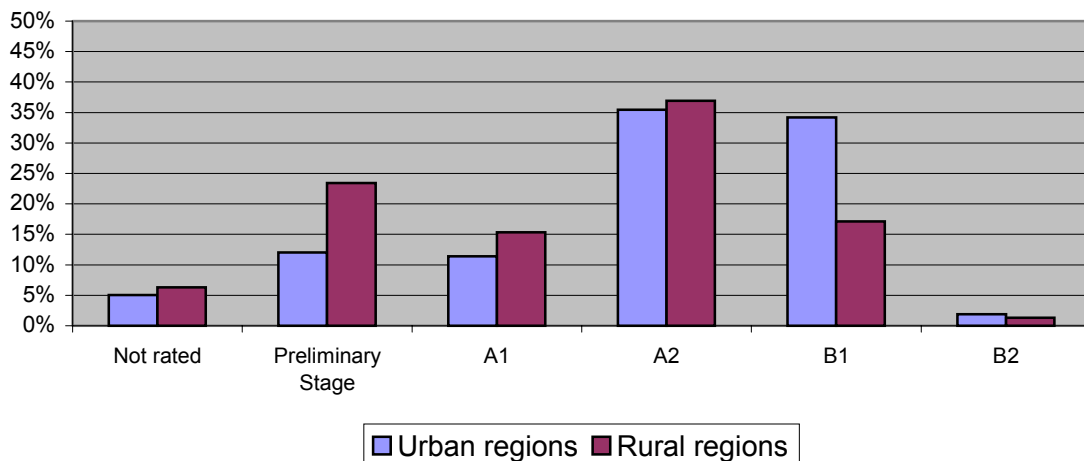


Diagram 6: Comparison between urban and rural regions

Diagram 7 presents the performance of girls and boys respectively. The results show no significant difference in their performance. This corroborates observations by most of the teachers and researchers in

the program and, therefore, challenges the widespread belief in the region of Thrace according to which girls show a lower proficiency in Greek compared to boys because of the restrictions that the culture of the particular population imposes to women.

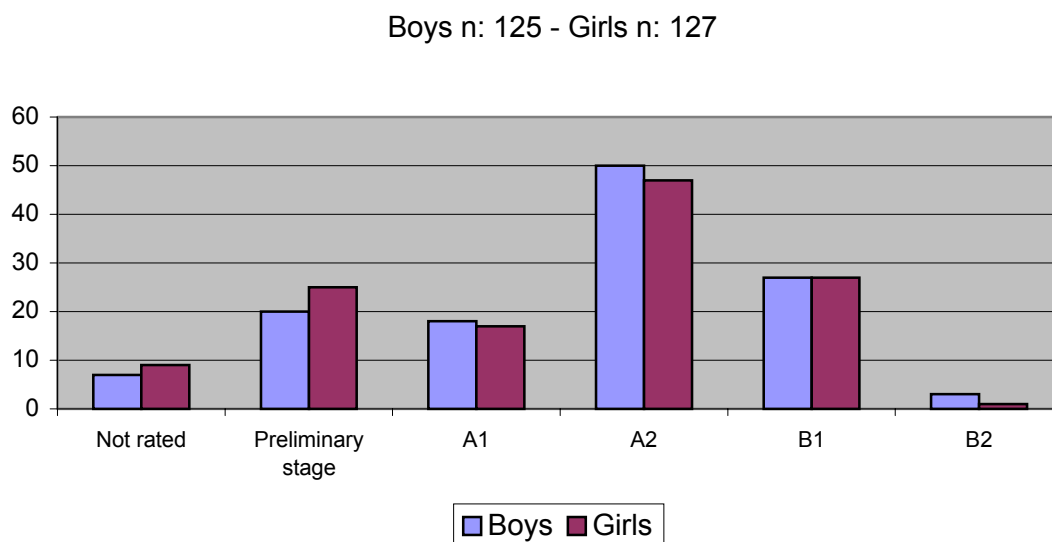


Diagram 7: Comparison between the two sexes

15. Impact of the language research sub-project within the educational reform program

The educational reform program that lasted nearly 10 years 1995-2004 had a large impact in the region. As said earlier educational issues were tightly interwoven with political issues. Thus, researchers working in the program had, above all, to deal with the negative attitudes of both communities. When the results of the different educational initiatives began to bear fruits, people’s attitude started to change. Progressively they realized that feelings of resentment and hostility cannot sustain a viable *modus vivendi* and that facts of the past, however traumatic, are part of the history, a history that should not be forgotten but should be studied not as source that nourishes aggression but in the light of building a better future.

In this changing context, the language assessment procedure influenced a great deal people working in Thrace. Although the research findings did not differ greatly from observations of the people working in minority schools, the language assessment procedure placed the issue of language in a new perspective. We all know that it’s quite common for people who do not have a linguistic training and are not familiar with issues of second language learning to consider intermediate stages of acquisition either as a disorganized pidgin language or as a manifestation of a confused way of thinking. Thus, the placement of children at a certain level, however low, in terms of a well-founded and widely accepted proficiency scale showed that their performance corresponds to a normal and predictable stage in the process of language acquisition. In

other words, language assessment left no room for speculations around linguistic deficiencies or ethnic inferiority of minority children.

Furthermore, the survey enables to organize educational initiatives on the basis of the language assessment specific findings. In this respect, it seems vital to deal with three main issues:

First, children start primary school with very little knowledge of Greek. As shown earlier the overwhelming majority of children of the first class (7 years) were placed at the Preliminary Stage. Therefore, it would be particularly helpful to develop pre-school educational structures in the region.

The second major problem that emerged during the course of our research is the unsteady progress of children in language proficiency. Thus, while during their first years at school (from 7 to 10 years old) they show a significant progress, their language variety is fossilized at the age of 10 in a low level. This situation most probably suggests that teaching does not proceed in an efficient way in the crucial phase between primary and secondary education. Consequently, educational and social prospects of those children with respect to secondary education are restricted. This maybe explains why a large percentage of children quit school once they have completed their primary education.

The third issue concerns the difference in proficiency within the same age group. As shown earlier children of the same age group range over a wide array of language proficiency levels. For instance level A2 includes children from the second to the sixth grade of primary school (8-12 years). It is clear that this major diversity between children of the same age should lead to an adjustment of teaching methods and educational materials.

Besides language assessment, another research strand within the language research project has focused on analyzing processes of second language acquisition. This research is based on the data provided by the oral interview and the written production. The narratives appearing in both interviews and writing tasks had been transcribed using CHAT, one of the tools included in the CHILDES database - a database designed for linguistic data concerning language acquisition process. Thus researchers can do quantitative and qualitative research on the order of acquisition of different linguistic components. Their work is backed up by the placement – on independent grounds - of each child at a certain level of proficiency. So far five independent research projects have been or are being conducted: on phonology, on vocabulary acquisition, on case and gender, on tense and aspect, on anaphora and on clitics. These research projects also provide the necessary data in order to establish in a reliable way the correlation between grammar and levels of proficiency and to specify the phenomenon of fossilization encountered in the course of language assessment.

It is worth noting, moreover, that the results of those investigations provide independent evidence in respect to the validity of the tests. Order of acquisition of specific phenomena tends to cluster in parallel to levels of proficiency.

In the next phase of the program, which will also be its last, we plan to extend language assessment to secondary schools, to disseminate the results of the language assessment both to teachers in the form of a teacher-friendly publication, and to specialists in the field in the form of a volume containing a comprehensive presentation of our research and its findings.

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