



Teaching Greek to students of the Muslim Minority of Thrace

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ABSTRACT: *Minority education, which has a specific nature within the context of the Greek educational reality, concerns the Muslim minority of Thrace and involves both social and political dimensions. The current paper provides general information on the minority population and agreements/protocols that defined the functioning of minority schools. This paper also presents the reasons why minority children do not learn Greek.*

KEYWORDS: *Muslim Minority of Thrace, Minority Students, Teaching Greek*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The area of Thrace, in northern Greece is a typical multicultural society consisting of a Christian population group of native Greek-born Thracians, Arvanites, Pontians, few Armenians and other Returnees, as well as a Muslim minority of Turkic/Turkic-speaking, Pomaks and Roma [1].

The Muslim minority of Thrace arose in the context of the exemption from the mandatory population exchange between Greece and Turkey under the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. It is the only institutionally recognized minority in the country [2].

The Muslims of Thrace are Greek citizens, who have all the rights and obligations that all the citizens of the Greek state have. Their number is around 100,000 with a visible trend of decreasing due to the low birth rate. The minority resides in all three Thrace counties, namely the Prefectures of Xanthi, Rodopi and Evros with the first two covering the largest percentage [3].

The minority is not homogenous with the exception of religion. In terms of spoken languages and culture, it is divided into three sub-groups:

- Turkish-Turkish speakers, speaking Turkish and today, who do not exceed 50% of the minority population [4],
- Pomaks, who speak Pomak, and
- Roma, who speak Romani, (their estimated population is 20,000) [5,6,7].

II. MINORITY EDUCATION

The Treaty of Lausanne has been the legal foundation for the functioning of minority schools since 1923. The legal status of minority schools is complemented by provisions of the 1968 Cultural Protocol and the 2000 Greco-Turkish Agreement on Cultural Co-operation, which replaced the 1951 Education Agreement. The 1968 Education Protocol between the two countries includes recommendations on educational issues regarding minority schools (language of instruction, curriculum, supervisory material, textbooks, subjects).

Minority School has long been the pillar of minority education and a reference point for minority members as a symbol of the protection of their linguistic and religious specificity [8].

III. MINORITY SCHOOLS

Attendance at minority schools is optional for the members of the minority and, on the other hand, students of Greek origin are not allowed to enroll [9]. The level of primary education is the only field in which minority education exists as an organized system [8].

Minority schools of the Primary Education belong to a different institutional status, since they have both private and public status and, moreover, they are supervised by the Ministry of Education.

The main specificity of these schools is their bilingual program. In 1957, the detailed curriculum for minority education was drawn up, consolidating its bilingual character, which is still in force [2]. The curriculum's content is structured on two languages of instruction, Greek and Turkish. Greek language, history, geography, environmental studies, political and social education are taught in Greek. On the other hand, Turkish language, mathematics, physics, religion and music are taught in Turkish, while each syllabus demands different textbooks and teachers [2,8]. The time spent teaching Greek and Turkish language syllabi is equal.

The Greek language course books are published under the responsibility of the Greek educational authorities. Until 1999-2000, minority schools used the same books taught in all schools of the country, which were addressed to native Greek speakers and, therefore, completely unsuitable for foreign-language students. These books were replaced with new ones made specifically for minority schools by the Muslim Education Program. Since 2000, the above constitute the official books of the Greek language program. These books take into account that Greek is not the mother tongue of the Muslim students. Books of the Turkish-language program are imported from Turkey after the signing of the new "Education Agreement" in 2000 and are specifically addressed to the Muslim minority.

In these schools, the principal is always Muslim, while the deputy principal is Christian. Both share the same responsibilities and duties and must cooperate closely.

IV. MINORITY STUDENTS LEARNING GREEK

It is true that the Greek language is not the mother tongue of minority Muslim students. The Greek language is the dominant language of education and society, and which, minority students are obliged to learn as a second language. The second language (i.e. Greek) is that which is learnt when the child goes to school and is used by the bilingual child in order to be able to meet his/her basic need for communication [10].

In minority schools, the vast majority of students have limited knowledge of Greek. Children have limited contact with Greek, as they use almost exclusively Turkish in their daily interactions and, at the same time, they watch almost exclusively Turkish television on daily basis [11]. The problem is that, despite the teaching of the Greek language, these children - with certain exceptions - speak a little Greek.

The reasons leading to the students' limited knowledge of Greek are various. Curricula is a primary factor. There were some modernizing efforts, aiming at curriculum changes and structural reforms at the Minority School. However, they have not been and are not accepted, and, very often, these efforts face suspicion and prejudice, and, as a result, they remain incomplete. It seems more feasible to intervene in school reality by changing the Curricula, which will be dictated by a new pedagogical concept for the education and training of members of a Minority. A change of the curricula, within a new pedagogical concept, should provide answers to the great dilemma of either assimilating the cultural minority or maintaining cultural identity [12].

Intercultural education aims to meet the needs arising from the evolution of monocultural societies into multicultural societies and aims to "bridge" the dilemma of assimilation-preserving cultural identity. Intercultural education should propose the organization of curricula in order to use creatively all the elements that a child brings with him/her from home to school, in the form of experiences of the relevant culture. The aim is to avoid conflicts and tensions that lead to the rejection of any new idea and resistance to all developments, which lead to self-isolation and the formation of stereotypes and prejudices. Through the programs of this kind, the balance between integration and cultural identity is expected, with the teaching the language being the primary tool, the learning of which is currently minimized in its narrower communication role. Finally, we should emphasize that the Curriculum of Elementary Schools, as a school with a bilingual Curriculum, requires the teaching and learning of two languages, Turkish, as a minority language and the official language of the country, Greek.

The second factor for which Muslim pupils do not learn Greek is teachers' limited ability to teach the pupils' mother tongue. Almost all modern literature on language teaching documents that, if the school does not pay attention to the language already spoken by the pupil, students cannot be able to learn other language skills and languages [13, 14]. On the other hand, the theory that an early two-language meeting in child's consciousness will cause problems of linguistic development and possibly linguistic delay is very old and has always been used to legalize the request for either separate schools or monolinguals in favor of the official language of the country, or - at best - bilingual schools. On the whole, modern psycho-linguistic research and research on the language development of the child emphasize the opposite: that the organization and development of language learning is not adversely affected by the simultaneous learning of languages at an

early age and that early bilingualism itself does not create problems for the development of the child's personality [15].

Especially for minorities, their mother language is their world. It is the force that forms their identity, shapes their group, and acts as a connecting link between its members. Language for a Minority Community is not only a means of communication among its members, but, by extension, it contributes to the preservation of their cultural heritage.

According to Anna Fragoudaki, the theory of bilingualism speaks about passive knowledge and the interdependence of languages. The way to learn language is from passive to active knowledge [16]. Also, the interdependence theory of languages argues that learning a second language is not an additive process, i.e. not only vocabulary and syntax skills are added, but also concepts and linguistic elements are transferred from one language to another [12,15].

The third factor of difficulty for Muslim students to learn the Greek language is the learning process used in both elementary and junior high school. Muslim minority pupils are experiencing great difficulties due to the fact that the Greek language is significantly different from their mother tongue and only in terms of the phonetic and phonological system, which, from the outset, has a significant influence on the spoken language, not to mention the other language levels of morphosyntax, vocabulary and meaning, or even on the level of use of the language in given communication conditions [17].

The same situation happens with Muslim students learning the Turkish language. Turkish is a language without genders, inclinations, and verbal types are very different. Stavros Yilotzoglou, a special associate at Ankara University, argues that the difficulty of Muslims to learn Greek is due to the fact that the two languages, Greek and Turkish, belong to different language families. The Turkish language belongs to the Uraltaic language family, which means many differences in grammar, syntax, word production, sentence structure, etc. It also has no articles, genders, the secondary sentences are assigned with verb verbs, the verb always enters the end of the sentence, the determinations are preceded by the specified term. The roots of the words do not change and for the formation of cases or numbers, times, inclusions and voices are added at the end of the root successively to any suffixes necessary to express the requested type [18].

The student, therefore, who became a speaking person using the Turkish language, has a great difficulty to learn in particular those linguistic elements for which there is no correspondence in his native language. If the teacher is not familiar with the knowledge of languages and, especially, the peculiarities of the Turkish language, s/he hears something very strange in his/her ears that gives him/her an impression of a "creole" language [18].

A major role in the learning of the Greek language by the Muslim population is played by the methodology of teaching the language. In order to communicate through language, it is not enough to understand and form correct grammatical sentences. Language skills should be combined with communication skills, i.e. appropriate use of speech according to the communication situation. The student must become familiar with the forms that language communication takes in the social realm, so authentic texts are necessary in the teaching of the language course, as they appear in the social realm: oral dialogs and discussions, interviews, letters, news bulletins, newspaper and magazine articles, literary texts, advertisements, contracts, ads, instructions for use etc. [15].

In the communicative approach, the teacher plays a designer-coordinator role in open and adaptive programs focused on the student. Therefore, applying the communicative approach of the language subject means formulating a framework and real conditions of communication, spoken and written, It also means allowing and strengthening all forms of spontaneous communication. For Muslim children, it means accepting the mistakes that children make, accepting the means of communication they use, and, consequently, accepting their own identity. This involves enlightened teachers, away from racist perceptions and with the sole aim of indulging in their students' learning problems, listening to their anguish and understanding their mistakes, which many are the result of their own language code [19].

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it should be stressed that, despite the efforts and huge steps that have been made by both the minority and the majority, the problems will not be eliminated, as they are deep-rooted. As long as the relations between the two states involved remain tense and as long as the educational policies, and in particular bilingual education, do not unfold their essential role, the education of the minority of Thrace will remain at a level which is debatable whether it promotes meaningful bilingual literacy.

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