

European Congress
Literacy and Numeracy European Network(EUR-ALPHA)
Organized by
University of Macedonia, Department of Educational and Social Policy, Greece
Lire et Ecrire (Communaute Francaise asbl), Belgium

11 – 13 October 2010, Thessaloniki, Greece

Communication circumstances of adults learning Greek as a second language

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1. Introduction

While Greece was a mission country of human potential to other countries up to the last years, from the 20th century and more concretely from 1990 and afterwards with the collapse of the socialistic regimes of Eastern Europe, has become a multicultural society with the arrival of economic immigrants, resettlers and refugees (Ventoura, Mpagavos, Papadopoulou, 2006). The phenomenon of immigration required and requires measures of social policy and informal practices, so that the problems, which are likely to emerge, can be faced and the social cohesion can be achieved.

In this framework of the migratory and social policy are included the various programmes of learning Greek as a second or a foreign language which are addressed to the population groups mentioned above and are offered by different institutions in Greece. The first stage for the construction of a language programme is the the detection of language and communication needs of the students who participate in this. The present study is focused on the detection of the profile and of the language needs of the participants in the “Programme of learning Greek language in Certified Centres of Vocational Training for unemployed immigrants, resettlers, refugees and other unemployed emanating from frail society teams for whom the inadequate knowledge of Greek language functions as an obstacle to their social incorporation”.

Aim of this study is to record and detect the profile and the language and communication needs of Greek language students relying on the communication approach and on the models of language needs analysis.

2. Clarification of the meanings

Between the concepts “second” and “foreign” language there is a clear distinctive line with basic among others criterion the socio-cultural environment where the language learning takes place. So, we talk about second language, when its learning takes place in an environment where this constitutes the dominant and the natural means of communication among the members of this language community and thus the learner can use it as a transmitter and receive it as a receptor with a direct way (Mitsis, 1998). Consequently, there is an “alive” space of use (Skourtou, 1999). According to the above, Greek language is considered second for the resettlers, who live in our country and learn Greek, which is not their mother tongue. Also, Greek is a second language for the children of the national minorities for example the Pomak’s children (Tsili, 1998), who have got their mother tongue, but they live in Greece, they participate in Greek education and they activate in the Greek society.

On the contrary, in the case of foreign language the learners haven’t got the opportunity neither to participate in real communication circumstances, nor to take part in an “alive” language activity (Mitsis, 1998), except for the classroom, where the teaching and

learning of the foreign language takes place. Consequently, the term “foreign language” refers to any other language, which isn’t used as a main communication code by the native population of a country. The foreign language learning isn’t supported at all by the environment and it lacks a direct space of use. But its learning “promises” the existence of this space in the future (Skourtou, 1999). For example, we learn English language because we will use it in the future, not because we use it directly

Another distinctive element for these two meanings is the linguistic background of the learners (Kecskes&Papp, 2000). In the case of second language students usually come from several countries and there is a variety in their mother tongues, while in the case of foreign language the learners almost always have only one native language common for all. This discrimination is useful because it influences the whole organization and planning of language teaching.

R. Richterich, head of the team of experts of the Council of Europe, which worked on issues of foreign languages teaching and learning, defines language needs of adults learning a second language as the requirements which arise from the use of that language in the multitude of situations of these individuals’ life (Richterich, 1980). As language needs analysis is defined the inquiring process, whose result determines the language programme choices and constitutes a condition for its planning (Tokatlidou, 2003). Each individual’s language needs are needs for language conquest with final objective the communication achievement. Each person feels the need to conquer the language, in order to use it as a tool for successful and effective communication with his interlocutors. Consequently, the language learning objective is not only the acquirement of the linguistic competence, but the conquest of the communicative competence too. Therefore, language needs are communication needs.

3. Communication approach and the language needs models

The communication approach has got as a basic principle that in the centre of teaching should be placed the learner and his or her needs and interests satisfaction. Its objective is the acquisition and growth of the learner’s communicative competence. This means that the speaker should produce speech not only grammatically correct but also suitable for each communication circumstance, in order to achieve the effective communication, which means transmission of the message with an effective way and not necessarily grammatical correctness (Baker, 2001). The communication circumstances create the individual’s language needs.

The teacher always takes into consideration the students’ needs for the selection of the material he will use and for its presentation and negotiation. He is the person who detects the students needs and interests and afterwards he tries to satisfy them. His role is to plan, to guide and to advise the students. He’s the mediator between the students and the activities he coordinates. At the same time he’s member of the team too, because he participates himself in the activities. For the communication approach the class is a team of equal interlocutors and partners and the students’ and teacher’s traditional roles are demolished (Mitsis, 1996). The teacher is responsible to create an atmosphere of safety and freedom in the classroom, where each student can express himself.

According to the communication approach in language teaching the student’s role is different too, in comparison with the traditional approach. The communication approach brings out the students’ active participation in the teaching process, because they take part in the activities handle the teaching material creatively and have got the responsibility for their learning. For the students’ appreciation is taken into account their ability to achieve speech acts, where are shown the language functions they have practised and not the knowledge of a grammatical phenomenon or the ability to make sentences grammatically correct (Tsobanoglou, 1985). Finally as concerns the material which is used in order to develop the students’ communicative competence, it should be “authentic”, like posters, instructions for use a machine, songs, letters, recipes, classified advertisements, poems, comics,, advertisements etc.

As concerns the language needs detection have been developed 4 models and approaches: 1) the model of Richterich with his study “Definition of language needs and types of adults” (1973), 2) the model of Richterich-Chancerel with their study “Identifying the needs of adults learning a foreign language” (1977), 3) the model of Munby with his work “Communicative Syllabus Design” (1978) and 4) the model of Hymes SPEAKING (1972), which the questionnaire of our research was based on.

Hymes’ model comes from the field of the ethnography of communication and presents the communication event components, grouped in eight teams. Each one of these teams corresponds to a letter of the code word SPEAKING. These teams are: 1) Setting, that is the place and the time of the speech act, the conditions, where the communication takes place, 2) Participants in the communicative events. The interlocutors are the sender or speaker and the receiver or hearer. 3) Ends of the communication. This component includes the communication purposes and goals as well as its outcomes. 4) Act sequences which are carried out. This component includes the message form, that is how things are said, and the message content, 5) Key of the communication. This component refers to the tone, manner or spirit of a speech act. 6) Instrumentalities of the communication. This component defines the medium of transmission of speech (for example telephone). 7) Norms of behaviour, namely the specific behaviours, rules that attach to speaking, for example that somebody shouldn’t interrupt his interlocutors or that one may freely do so, and finally, 8) Genres of the oral and written speech, which the interlocutors come more often into contact with and they need to understand. Consequently, with the language needs investigation, we seek indeed the communication circumstances, where they need to use this language.

4. Institutions of teaching Greek as a second language

A lot of institutions offer lessons of Greek as a second language. We are going to present in a few words the following three:

1) The Centre for the Greek language, which was established in 1994 in Thessaloniki and it is supervised and financed by the Ministry of Education (www.greeklanguage.gr). Among the academic divisions, which is composed of, there is the Department of Greek language Support and Promotion, which holds the examination for the Certificate of Attainment in Modern Greek, develops research projects and offers supportive material for the teaching of Greek as a second or a foreign language. In this framework there is a significant number of publications, researches and projects carried out by the Centre of Greek language.

2) The Centres of Adults Education (CAE), which are supported by the Institute of Adults Continuing Education. There are many and different programmes offered by the CAE. The programme “Odysseas: Immigrants’ education in Greek language, Greek history and Greek culture” applies to immigrants 16 years old and over of any origin. The main objective of the programme is the Greek language learning as a means so that the social exclusion the immigrants maybe are facing can be prevented and faced.

3) The Centres of Vocational Training (CVT), public and private, having as a purpose to hold programmes of continuing vocational training. The CVT are supervised by the National Accreditation Centre for Continuing Vocational Training (EKEPIS), an independent organization which is supervised by the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection. There are various programmes. The programme of Greek language learning is addressed to unemployed immigrants, resettlers, refugees and other unemployed for whom the inadequate knowledge of Greek language functions as an obstacle to their social incorporation.

5. Research methodology

The first aim of our research was to locate the communication circumstances, which the adults language students are involved in, that is the conditions which a language message is produced in. The second aim was to detect the general profile of the particular programme students.

Our research was held at the time period from 1st until 15th of November 2009. 11 certified Centres of Vocational Training of the prefecture of Thessaloniki, materialized the particular programme of Greek language learning. From these three were chosen at random in order to hold our research and 119 questionnaires were assembled.

For the construction of the questionnaire we used, we were based on the theoretical model of Hymes, which presents the components of the communication events and constitutes from two parts. The first one includes eight questions and concerns the participants' demographic characteristics, while the second includes seven questions which concern the use of Greek language in their daily life. For the offered in each question choices we were based on the questionnaire that was used for the structure of the "Threshold-Level for modern Greek (T-Level)".

The results we present were confirmed by another research we hold at the time period from 23rd of April until 23rd of May 2010 to the participants of the Programme of Greek language learning offered by the Christian Youth Union of Thessaloniki, as there wasn't a significant variation at the findings.

6. Presentation of the results

From our research came as a result that 79% of the asked people, is between 25 to 55 years old. This is mainly the age-group which participates in education and learning processes. Only 6% belongs to the age-group 16-24 years old and 15% is 55 years old and over.

As for the sex the overwhelming percentage is women (87%) contrary to men (13%). Women traditionally participate more often in education and learning processes. (These results are shown in the following slide number 9).

Most of the participants (39%) are graduates of Secondary Education, 31% hold a University title and 19% are graduates of Superior Technical Education. On the contrary only 10% are high school graduates. Therefore the assumption that when a person has obtained the basic education level, he or she involves more in learning processes.

Over the half participants, 52% has got Russian as a mother tongue, 16% Albanian, 11% Pontic, 7% Armenian, 4% Georgian, 3% Turkish and finally 2% has got as a mother tongue Ukrainian. It is remarkable that 5% answered that Greek was its mother tongue (slide 10).

As concerns the duration of their stay in Greece, the overwhelming percentage lives in Greece more than a year and only 1% lives in our country less than six months. So, almost all of the participants have come to Greece not occasionally but with the prospect to stay permanently in our country. Besides, the attendance of this Greek language learning programme gives the students the opportunity to participate in the examinations in order to obtain the Certificate in Greek language, so that they can stay for a long time in Greece.

As concerns the utilization of free time, a big percentage 29% often listens to music, an activity which doesn't require the knowledge of language, 28% often deals with reading and 25% often watches television. On the contrary few of them often go out with friends (8%), do sports (6%), go to concerts, theatre or cinema (4%), activities which require an amount of money and perhaps that's the reason for these low percentages (slide 11).

The second part of the questionnaire included seven questions. For each question were offered certain choices. For each choice the participants were asked to choose among "a lot", "a little" and "not at all". The first question was focused on the reasons of Greek language learning. For each reason of Greek language learning we selected the positive choice "a lot" and came as a result the Chart 1.6 (slide 12).

In each column is shown how many from the 119 participants made the particular choice. Therefore the most learn Greek because Greek language fascinates them, they need or they will need it for their work and because they want to communicate with their Greek-speaking relatives or friends. Only 45 from the 119 learn Greek because they need or will need them for studies. These results show that they learn Greek not only because they like

Greek as a language but also for practical and communication reasons, too, such as to find a job or to communicate with their Greek relatives and friends.

As for the places of oral speech production where the communication takes place and the participants need to speak in Greek correctly distinguish the market, the public-administrative services and the places of work as it is shown by the Chart 2.6 (slide 13)

The persons, who the participants talk in Greek with, are shown in the Chart 3.6 (slide 14). The lowest percentage assembles the family. This fact shows that the adults students maybe choose to use their mother language in order to communicate with their family, something that is also confirmed by the previous chart where the home as a place of oral speech production assembles lower percentage.

The genres of the oral speech, which the participants in our research come more often into contact with and they need to understand are the telephone talk, the news on television and on radio, various television programmes, lectures-courses, public announcements, radio programmes, plays at the theatre or cinema. All the genres assemble the participants' preference, as it is shown in the Chart 4.6 (slide 15).

From the genres of written speech, which the adults students come more often into contact with and they need to read and understand are the official documents (contracts, applications etc.), which are met in the everyday life, the means of transport timetable and the official letters. On the contrary the e-mails/sms assemble a lower percentage.

As for the written speech production, 91% finds very important to be able to write in Greek official documents and applications, 88% Curriculum Vitae and the 85% formal letters. Then it comes the informal letters (73%), the articles (68%), simple and short instructions (65%) and finally the e-mails/sms (60%) and the personal diary (59%). Consequently, distinguish the genres of written speech which have a practical value (Charts 5.6, slide 16).

Finally as concerns the language acts the speakers carry out using the Greek language, came as a result that 83% uses Greek language in order to ask and give information, 82% to make social contacts, 81% to describe someone or something, 79% to express ideas, 76% to invite someone or to suggest something, 75% to make or to cancel an appointment, 74% to advise someone and express feelings and finally 71% uses Greek language in order to express personal opinions (Chart 6.6, slide 17).

7. Conclusions

From our research is shown that the immigrants, the resettlers and the refugees use Greek language as a means, a tool in order to achieve an effective communication result. The communication approach faces the language in the same way and has got as an objective the successful communication, which is achieved with the production of speech suitable for the various communication circumstances, which were defined through our research. As it came out from our research, the adult student of Greek as a second language is woman 45-55 years old, graduate of the secondary education, who has got Russian as a mother tongue and lives in Greece more than a year. We believe that the result of this detection will contribute to the program's objectives determination, to the teaching methods, that will be followed, to the type of the instructive material that will be used. Therefore, the findings of our research could be very useful to the proper institutions which deal with learning and teaching Greek as a second or a foreign language.

8. References

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