

mercredi 16h15 – 17h00

1. Belgique – Natalie VERSTRAETE
 2. Grèce - Tita KAISARI ERNST
 3. Italie – Lorenzo ROCCA - qui remplace Maria Assunta ROSA
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Greek language courses for Refugees – the challenges

Since 2015 Greece has been one of the countries of transit for a big number of refugees. Today the estimation is that around 60.000 refugees are in Greece. Even after the Joint Statement European Union - Turkey, Greece is considered by most of the refugees as a country of passage/transit. Actually a lot of the refugees do not want to stay in Greece. In this context of emergency and recovery, learning Greek is becoming more and more important, because as a matter of fact all of the refugees residing for an important time spectrum in the country.

In the 90s a big number of migrants mostly from the countries of ex-Soviet Union and the East block came in Greece. As a result big programs of Greek as second language for adults were realised. The most known was the program „Odysseas“ (Ulysses), which gave the opportunity to migrants to follow courses organised by the municipalities. At the same time in the schools the model of the Reception Classes and the Zone of Priority Education was developed at the primary and secondary education. The intercultural schools were founded. For the children of Greeks living outside Greece, a language curriculum and methodology of Greek as second language was developed. The rise of the Erasmus students exchanges has also contributed to the boost of the centres of languages of Universities and of the courses of Greek as a foreign language. Finally a Master Degree in Greek as second language started in 1993.

As a result, appropriated methods and specialised teachers of Greek as foreign or second language exist. Moreover Greek is taught as foreign language at certain schools and language centres. However, there is no doubt that there are a lot of challenges concerning Greek language courses for refugees.

Greece is today in a recovery phase of the refugee issue. In this context, the main reason to learn Greek is the communication for daily issues. The knowledge of Greek language is rare perceived as an educational asset, which could facilitate or contribute to find a job or even to study. Speaking or understanding some Greek is a question of surviving, while learning German or English is more appealing. Greek is a *language of transit*. Trying to persuade young adults to learn Greek, I have gotten more than once the answer “why to learn Greek? It is not useful”. I have never gotten the answer “Greek is difficult”, a very common statement for instance by Europeans. The perception of Greek as a not very useful language is very strong in the refugee population. There are some indices that this perception changes among recognised refugees residing in apartments or among the ones, which have decided to stay in Greece. However, most of refugees in Greece are not very motivated to learn Greek, probably because they do not imagine their future in Greece.

It is also true that during the emergency responses and the humanitarian recovery, learning a language is not the priority. The courses of languages offered inside the refugee camps, are planned as activities of non-formal education and not as language courses in a strict sense. Their educational goal is not for instance to cover the A1 level. In most of the cases they have first of all a psychosocial dimension. Once again Greek language is viewed primarily as a survival tool and not as a tool for the integration to a society.

It is also a fact that learning Greek as a second or foreign language has been conceived as part of the spectrum of formal education. What does it mean learning a language in a non-formal education setting?

Till now NGOs and solidarity groups of volunteers has been offering courses of Greek to refugee children, young adults and adults. A lot of the teachers were young people, who have studied Greek literature or even had a Master in Greek as foreign language. Some of them developed their own learning material based on the needs of their pupils. It has to be also noted that Universities and their academic personnel have played an important role as volunteers or working in cooperation with NGOs. For instance the department of languages of the University of Athens was involved in courses offered to refugees in the Reception Facilities of Elaionas in Athens. The Hellenic Open University developed and implemented a program for refugee including language courses. The University of Aegean had also offered a series of activities. These experiences seem to renew the scientific research. Hopefully they will lead to the development of methods based on the needs of new learners, of users of mother tongues, which have not been often encountered in Greece.

Taking into account that a number of refugees will stay in Greece and have an interest to learn Greek in order to be integrated in the society, the Ministry of Education considers launching a program of Greek and English for refugees 15+. At the same time NGOs and solidarity groups continue to offer courses of Greek, German, English and less often French to refugees. LIAM could be of an important tool to their efforts for quality courses of language.

In conclusion, depending the phase of the refugee issue, the needs and the goals of Greek courses are different. Whereas survival Greek is in need in emergency situation, in the recovery and integration phase courses of Greek for basic and independent users are in question. It is true that the emergency and recovery refugee response in Greece is challenging mainstream thinking in the context of education. What it is thought as extraordinary is not. For instance, teaching Greek as foreign language to various and heterogeneous groups, like children, illiterates etc. What is taken for granted, is not. For instance, that the courses of Greek language are mainly an integration tool or an educational asset. The launching of LIAM is marking this need to think out of the box.