

Relativism in Language Ideology: On Greece's Latest Language Issues

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Abstract

Language relativism can be associated with two major conceptions: that “each language has or is a particular spirit” and that “each language has or is a—real or imagined—territory.” Spirituality and territoriality combined give rise to the ideology of a language as a realm. This ideology of Modern Greek as a regime language has become dominant after the official establishment of a standard norm (demotic) and the resolution of the perennial “Greek Language Question.” As it is evidenced by a host of “language issues” raised in the Greek newspapers since 1976, relativism has determined what counted as a “language issue” that was worth publishing, which language issues were eligible for public debates, and the extent to which language issues were allowed to penetrate “public opinion.”

Introduction

One of the strongest versions of the postulation that “language determines thought” associates each language with a distinct “thought world” or “worldview”—to use B. L. Whorf’s favorite popularizing terms (1956: 147, 221). Such a worldview, it is often said, can only partially and incompletely be rendered into another language. Under the “relativity hypothesis” (Werner 1997, Lucy 1992a, Rossi-Landi 1973), worldviews are indeed incommensurable. A thought world, obviously, is considered to be too big an entity to be jammed between two different languages, but small enough to be contained in a single one.

Introductory books in linguistics (e.g., Lyons 1968:433) readily reject such a strong version of the linguistic relativity hypothesis as untenable, and for good reasons—translatability between languages being an obvious one. Translation renders thought worlds commensurate, precisely through what was supposed to keep them apart: language. Through translation “worlds apart” become only “words apart” (Davidson 1984:189). *Conceptual* relativity also runs counter to a researcher’s

guiding intuition: even while admitting that people see through different conceptual lenses, relativists nevertheless cannot underestimate the contribution of comparative, interpretive, or discursive practices—including their own—in bringing forth the differences *in* people's world views. "Different points of view make sense, but only if there is a common co-ordinate system on which to plot them" (Davidson 1984:184; cf. Davidson 1997).

I propose instead to take this strong version of "linguistic" relativity quite seriously, but not as a hypothesis for *linguistic* research.¹ I believe that one can maintain the relativity hypothesis on a *metalinguistic* plane. What I propose is to consider the strong version as a *metalinguistic* maxim and, more particularly, as a *maxim of language ideologies*. Reformulated on this level, relativity does not concern the organization of linguistic facts, except in an indirect way; it concerns rather the way "we" (most people), in our "habitual thought worlds," conceptualize language, even in the absence of or contrary to linguistic facts, like the ones entertained by linguists. Linguistic relativity can be seen as the foundation of a then widespread conception *of* languages and *of* language in general—irrespective of whether it is also found operative *in* or *across* languages. And it may be that not only through our "common," "folk," or "pre-scientific" ways we conceptualize and talk about language(s), but also much of our unguarded "theoretic," "scientific," or "expository" discourse—i.e., much of our "explicit scientific world view" (Whorf 1956:21)—rests on such a foundation.²

I will be concerned here with just one "application" of this metalinguistic maxim. I will consider the issues and controversies surrounding and following the official settlement (1976) of the perennial Greek "Language Question," and will examine how such issues are motivated and shaped by language relativism. I will offer only a conceptual model and will argue that it will be useful for the classification of a rapidly growing number of texts in the Greek press. However, I will not consider any texts in detail; I will cite only a few excerpts. My focus will be on text types rather than text tokens. By emphasizing thematic categories rather than particular texts, I hope to show that the model that I submit here *belongs* to the texts in question and it is not imposed on them by my act of classification: disparate texts are indeed *organized* by language relativism or, alternatively, relativism *fits* particular texts (Davidson 1984:191 ff.).

Relativism's transformations

I call *language relativism* the strong version of the relativity hypothesis in order to distinguish it from the weaker research hypotheses often

advanced by linguists. Accordingly, I will speak of the *maxim*, the *principle*, or, occasionally, the *stereotype* of language relativism.

A glance at the history of language relativism suffices to demonstrate its heavy ideological load. As it is widely recognized now (Miller 1968, Berlin 1999, Kedourie 1993), language relativism figured prominently in the works of early romantics. It has been the cornerstone of German romanticism and it is associated with philosophers such as Johann Gottfried von Herder, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, August Wilhelm von Schlegel, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Wilhelm von Humboldt. Of course, there have been predecessors. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel has his share. And German romantics heavily drew from their proclaimed adversary, Jean Jacques Rousseau, who held that “l’esprit en chaque langue a sa forme particulière” in 1762 (1966:134). Gottfried Wilhelm Freiherr von Leibniz had also been one of the first to associate such an *esprit* with the virtues of a people, the German people in his case (Leibniz 1679/1697). Many others preceded and many more followed. One should not be surprised to find among them the solemn Nikolai Sergeievich Trubetzkoy, the “prince of modern linguistics,” in search for a euro-asiatic spirit (Trubetzkoy 1920–1936).

I doubt whether there is any single originator of this idea of relativism. Many could claim parenthood, or at least claim that they have seen or shown a language’s particular spirit. What is indeed most striking about the early occurrence of such an idea is how obvious, how “common” it seems to be from the very beginning. The idea that a spirit inhabits the language of a people or that the spirit of a people is imprinted in their language is a typical instance of what one could redundantly call a “collective idea”: the convergence of several minds on a common conception encompassing a plurality of things. Indeed, spiritual relativism praises a collectivity, a language, in which another collectivity is being recognized, the people or the nation. Out of these two “pluralities” and only through their association, a singularity is being established. This singularity has been called by several names. To mention just a few: “character,” “identity,” “spirit,” “soul,” “temper,” “ethos,” “morality,” “values,” “genius,” “mentality,” “ways of thought,” “ways of life,” “world view,” “thought worlds,” “thoughts,” “thought.”

Collective ideas, in the above sense, are precisely what one expects in ideological movements. Using the vehicle of emerging nationalisms, the spread of language relativism was tremendous. Language relativism has a very simple conceptual structure, which allows the basic idea to be adapted and transferred to several languages, periods, regions, tribes, and nations. Presumably, above and beyond these there is an “eternal spirit,” to use Fichte’s (and Hegel’s) term, which can be identified with the spirit of the nation in question. It is considered to be the obligation

of the whole nation, but most prominently the obligation of the men of letters, to protect, to foster, to cultivate this spirit, which alone can secure the singularity of the “Sprachnation,”³ and bring forth its superiority and greatness. The collectivity of such a perception can be explained; partly by the role certain intellectuals assign to themselves, their role as “fathers of the nation” (as some of them are often collectively called) partly by the religious or even ecclesiastical attachment to a spirit (which is idolized and worshiped) partly by the encompassing power of such a spirit which can comprise everything inhabiting language and thought. The structure of such an idea is precisely its ability to adapt, to expand, to convert, and to proselytize.

Generalities about a nation’s and a language’s spirit deserve to be treated as ideological stereotypes and in their most stereotyped version such generalities are transformed into a scholarly illusion of a sort. Once seen, the spirit can also be shown. Nations have “representatives” who are assumed to promote the alleged uniqueness of their language, and who undertake to cultivate its particular spirit and attempt to distinguish it from the spirit of languages conceived of as adversaries (see the collection of essays in Coussat, Adamski and Crépon 1996). Herder and Fichte, for example, warned against the influence of the French language on German, in much the same way as several scholars would complain today about the influence of English on their native language (or of “Englishes” on English). The influencer’s language is always considered to affect, ultimately, the *mentality* of the influenced language’s users.

Of the intellectuals propagating a language’s spirit, one category deserves special mention: linguists.⁴ In their pursuit for demarcations, linguists soon take the lead from philosophers. The “fathers of a standard language” follow after the “fathers of the nation.” The enormous literature on language standardization shows an obsessive preoccupation with this or that idea of spirituality fostered by linguists, lexicographers or linguistically inclined philologists who came to be recognized as “fathers” of this or that standardized norm; for numerous examples see Fodor and Hagège (1983/1984, 1989, 1990). One such example which concerns me the most is Manolis Triandaphyllidis, the “father of Standard Modern Greek,” who explicitly associated the two adversary linguistic norms, *demotic* and *katharevousa*, with distinct moralities. For Triandaphyllidis, each norm serves not just a different “grammatical ideal,” but also a different “ethos.” Thus, *katharevousa* is the language of an “archaist obsession,” “xenomania,” “pretension,” “atomism,” “deceit,” and “amateurism” characteristic of the Greek social and political life in general. By contrast, *demotic*, the “only *real* language,” “the language of the people,” is always pictured as the “language of truth

and progress" (Triandaphyllidis 1914:178, 1920:424, 1926:210, §12, 1932:217, 1949:489–490, 1960:65–66, 2001:160, 214, 330, *passim*). Each norm is indeed associated with a distinct "thought world," that is, a distinct *ideology* about the nation and its destiny.⁵

As it becomes part of the official ideologies surrounding the process of language standardization, spiritual relativism is soon forced to transform itself to what is often considered to be its opposite. A standard language can now be thought of as a *materialized spirituality*, as a *reified spirit* (Hegel). It can be thought of as a manageable communication means which has captured once and for all the nation's spirit, making it available, through education, to all its citizens. Through a standard language, the spirit propagates its force every time the language is spoken or written. Being institutional and individual at the same time, the "spirit" spreads.

As nations tend to identify with states (especially in the face of adversary states), a new conception emerges, the conception of a language's *territoriality*. The term should not be taken to apply merely to the region where the language in question is spoken. The new metonymic conception also applies to the idea of *the language itself* (Steiner 1971). Languages (especially in the face of other, adversary languages) are now conceived of as *territories* demarcated by frontier lines, drawn to protect a sacred Interior, which has to be kept intact by everything surrounding it. The Interior can now be pictured of as homogeneous in the dual sense: it comprises the linguistic result of standardization, that is, a particular *dialect*—even if this "dialect" is to be understood in an all-inclusive manner; and this same dialect is progressively spoken by more and more people within the region of a well-defined state. The standardized dialect thus ceases to be a dialect among others and it becomes a standard of others—a *language*. Languages themselves can be like realms; they can expand and "conquer" an opponent's territory, or they can shrink and diminish under "external" pressure. Under this—often officially advocated—conception, languages themselves *are* realms, which complement and, occasionally, fight each other on a map colored by different ideals.

A few words of warning are in order here. *This "competition between abstractions"* (Blommaert 1999:16) *is itself the result of language relativism*. This needs to be stressed, because it is often assumed, especially in scholarly discourse, that relativism is a real alternative to the "homogoneist" or "absolutist" conceptions of language—"homogoneist" conceptions being, more often than not, associated with nationalism. It is true that language relativism has been evoked principally within the framework of cultural liberalism. It is also true that "essentialist and homogoneist ideologies of language appear better suited for nationalistic

purposes, and better fit nationalist rhetorical frames, than others” (Blommaert 1999:18). Yet it is equally true that such “absolutist” conceptions are the historical outcomes of the relativist ones, from which they originate. As I hope to show, relativism is not incompatible with “homogeneist” ideologies of language. On the contrary, relativism *fits* and *organizes* “homogeneist” ideologies.

Commonplaces

It is exactly in the process of becoming institutionalized and stereotyped that checkpoints can be introduced in order to study the diffusion of language relativism and its penetration into common metalinguistic discourse. Obviously, the more formulaic the original idea becomes, the easier it is to attest it. Accordingly, the recurrence of relativist presuppositions would form a safe, even if oblique, indicator of the collectivity of the conceptual scheme that rests upon them, and also of its ability to transform itself and to adapt to various situations, agents, and interests.

In general, the discourse that incorporates such a conceptual scheme is expected to reflect the social organization of at least three concentric circles:

- a. *the elite* (forefathers of the nation and its standard language, philosophers, linguists, men of letters, those who officially and institutionally rationalize on language issues—such as professors of linguistics and members of the Academy)
- b. *the “small public”* (those who show some awareness about language issues, and could be adequately described as devotees or followers, as they usually echo the opinion of the elite; or those who act as mediators and informers in the way journalists do; or those who willy-nilly undertake to propagate the spirit’s minutest linguistic manifestations as in the case of educators)
- c. *the general public* (whatever that may be).⁶

I consider privileged the view into and from the middle circle—that is, the circle of “followers,” “mediators,” “informers,” and “propagators.” The discourse emanating from this “small public” directly reflects or propagates elitist presuppositions—but it does so without the conceptual complexity evidenced in the high register of the “originators.” At the same time, the view from the middle circle keeps our view unobstructed towards the attitudes of the general public, thus helping to make explicit the cognitive mechanisms involved in the formation of

public reflexes. Unless censorship restrictions apply, this mediating discourse often reports on issues of language contact or conflict—both prominent areas for applying the maxim of language relativism. Finally, the discourse of mediators, followers, propagators or even “craft professionals” (Cameron 1995:38–54), as public discourse par excellence, has an interesting reflexive quality; it is often offered as a model and on the model of an established linguistic standard, as demonstrated, e.g., by newspaper columns on language usage.

Newspaper articles are representative mostly of this intermediate circle referred to as the “small public.” Needless to say, among public and hasty orators it is much easier to find collective conceptions, commonplaces, clichés, stereotypes, and “idées reçues” (Yaguello 1988). Certainly, one needs to be on the alert for latent meanings and presuppositions, for the “implicit common frame of reference” underlying all relevant discourse (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998:191). Nevertheless, for the purpose of studying the ideological manufacturing of relativist assumptions, an informed reading of newspapers could be more informative than any hasty search through Herder’s *Sämtliche Werke*.

What is needed then is an approach that would treat each newspaper clipping as a *piece of a single discourse*; one organized on the basis of similar principles and presuppositions, an approach that would look for recurring themes and motifs, stress significant repetitions and provide evaluations on the basis of an adequate sample of texts. Such an approach to metalinguistic discourse should ultimately apply quantitative or semi-quantitative criteria, possibly by employing research methods of mass communication science. Employing large scale content analysis (rather than detailed analyses of authored text extracts), one can hope to establish what is often presupposed in the analysis of mass media texts: namely, that different instances of discourse are indeed tokens of a *single discourse type*.

In what follows, I will present only a very broad outline of research I conducted on the “coverage” of language issues in the Greek press. I do not have and I cannot offer here an exhaustive analysis.⁷ Instead of a detailed discussion of excerpts, I will concentrate on the *organizing principle* of the published articles, and will discuss what counts as a “language issue” or even a linguistic “piece of news” worthy to be placed on the busy agenda of the media. The organizing principle will be shown to be language relativism, recognizable in its most familiar facets of *spirituality* and *territoriality*. I begin with the most recent language issues.

Language issues

The seven issues that follow are the most representative “language issues” covered in the Greek press over a period of more than two decades.

1) In November 2001 a proposal by Anna Diamantopoulou (the Greek Commissioner in the European Union) to institutionalize English as the “second official language” in Greece was criticized very strongly in the press and the other media. Her proposal was reformulated to allay the fears of its critics. The revised proposal advised that English should be officially recognized as the “second necessary language” in Greece, in the sense that the task of teaching English as a second language should not be left to private language institutes but it should be part of the state’s educational policy. The revised proposal was treated with scorn added to suspicion.⁸

2) In January 2001 the Greek press published an open letter signed by forty members of the Athens Academy. The letter warned against the dangers of replacing the Greek alphabet with the Latin one, especially in the sector of information technology (e.g., e-mails written in “Greeklsh”). In this letter, the members of the Academy adopted, and re-circulated the well-known phobia of “latinization,” shared by linguistic conservatives (often called “traditionalists” and “technophobes” by their adversaries). The letter stirred up considerable “public concern,” according to claims made in the newspapers by the “small public” of devotees and informers.⁹

3) During 1998–1999, there was an uproar over the publication of a Modern Greek dictionary (1998) edited by G. Babiniotis, a Greek linguist known for his past “conservative” position on several language issues. The dictionary included an entry of sports slang for the word “Βούλγαρος” which literally means “Bulgarian.” The slang use of the word refers to a player in, or a fan of, a sports team from northern Greece. This entry was read as an insult to northern Greeks and as “a move that divides the nation.” A right-wing member of the parliament from northern Greece went to court to get Babiniotis’s dictionary banned. A lower court ruled that the controversial entry should be removed from all of the future editions of the dictionary and took measures against the circulation of the dictionary. The appeals reached the Supreme Court which annulled the lower court decision. Nevertheless, the controversial entry had already been removed from subsequent reprints and editions of the dictionary. (For details, see Koutsombolis 2004.)

4) Around 1995, several articles in the press argued against the use of the name “Macedonia” to refer to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) as well as against the use of the adjective “Macedonian” to refer to the official language of this Republic or to the unofficial minority language spoken in parts of northern Greece. During this period of excited national sentiments, patriotic speeches were delivered, protests were organized, and books on Ancient Greek Macedonia(n) were published (e.g., Babiniotis 1992). All of them were considered as “defense moves” against the “unfriendly act” of appropriating a “Greek word” to name a foreign neighbor state. The words “Macedonia” and “Macedonian” (both in official and common use) denote in Greece to this day either the Ancient Greek state and dialect or the Modern Greek region of Macedonia. Circumlocutions such as “Slav Macedonian,” “the language of Skopje,” and “quote-unquote Macedonian” are widely employed in reference to the contested language.¹⁰

5) In December 1994, a proposal by the French presidency in the European Union to reduce to five the number of working languages in the European Parliament and in other European Union representative organizations met the “resistance” of Greek politicians and intellectuals. With major billing in the press (not only in Greece but throughout Europe), the issue came to be known to Greek newspaper readers as the “European five-language regime” (καθεστώς πενταγλωσσίας). The French presidency’s proposal was withdrawn. The withdrawal was saluted as a “victory” of the Greek intellectuals and of Greek civilization. (For details, see Moschonas 2001a:109–116.)

6) In 1985, during the National Examination for Admission to Institutions of Higher Education, the failure of the examinees in essay writing to recognize the meaning of two “learned” words—“ευδοκίμηση” (prosperity) and “αρωγή” (assistance)—was considered to be an alarming indicator of Greek youth’s growing “λεξιπενία” (word poverty) and lack of contact with “older forms of Greek.” The spread of youth’s slang in the 1980s (Iordanidou and Androutsopoulos 1997), an idiom that was also judged to be “poor” and “vulgar,” was offered as an additional proof of λεξιπενία (Iordanidou and Androutsopoulos 1999). Since 1985, “λεξιπενία” has frequently been invoked as an argument for teaching “older forms of Greek” (especially Ancient Greek) in secondary education. It was assumed that training in the “riches” of Ancient Greek would de-pauperize the vocabulary of Greek youth.

7) In 1976, as part of a reform to end a case of perceived diglossia among the Modern Greeks, “standard Modern Greek,” a language based

on the *demotic* norm, became the official language of Greece.¹¹ The Greek press has often published articles expressing concern about the post-diglossia situation since 1976. The 1976 language reform itself was met with some resistance and mixed feelings by Greek intellectuals who were afraid of a loss of language and cultural heritage. In the 1980s, Babinotis and others (1996b; Greek Language Society 1984) claimed that a “language problem” (that is, the problem about the “quality of language”) has now replaced the Language Question. The debate on whether or not Ancient Greek should be taught in secondary education could be seen as resting on a post-diglossia syndrome (Philippaki-Warburton 1999:323) in which Ancient Greek served as a substitute for *katharevousa*—which continues to lead a shadowy but by no means unimportant existence alongside the *demotic*. (For the gradual “devaluation” of *katharevousa*, see Frangoudaki 1992). The salience of this issue is evident in the fact that a single newspaper, *Ελευθεροτυπία*, published up to three articles daily from 24 November 1986 through 1 June 1987, debating whether or not Ancient Greek should be taught in secondary education (Koutsou 2004). *Ελευθεροτυπία* introduced a new epistolary genre that became very popular—that of *solicited* letters to the editor.¹²

One could stop the list of language issues here. However, caution dictates that a few more issues should be taken into consideration. The additional issues below (8 through 10) were not treated in the press with the same passion as those above (1 through 7). Not as many columnists took issue, or if they did, the debate over these issues was short lived (“η επικαιρότητα δεν τα σηκώνει,” Greek journalists would say). Nonetheless, these issues recur over long periods of time with a noticeable persistence. Finally two more categories of issues need to be taken into consideration. Category 11 includes “αρνητικά δελτία” (“negative reports”) or “absence of entries” as defined by Dimaras (1997:151). The systematic “absence of entries” about the taboo issue of (linguistic) minorities belongs here. This issue surfaced in the non-local press only occasionally and then it was only mentioned with extreme caution. Category 12 contains miscellaneous publications, such as letters to the editor, usage columns, and “opposition articles.”

8) The issues of “foreign words” and “the influence of English on Greek” were also raised in the 1980s and persisted for about a decade. (It seems to have lost its intensity now.) It may not be accidental that these issues arose after the issue of “λεξιπενία” as it is not an accident that “λεξιπενία” also came up as an educational issue. Youth’s slang was a cause for concern because it was judged to be open to all sorts of foreignisms. It was soon realized, however, that many backdoors were left open, such as the terminologies of entertainment, computer sci-

ence, and information technologies (slangish in themselves). Three aspects from this period of “νεοκαθαρευουσιανισμός” (neo-purism) should be stressed (see also Delveroudi and Moschonas 1997/2003): A) The issue of “foreignisms” has remained the only publicly discussed case of language contact and spread since 1976. The pro-purist resolution of this issue has influenced the discussion of the relevant issues of bilingualism and multilingualism (see issue 1 above). B) The purist attitude was widely endorsed in Greece in the 1980s. A considerable editorial investment was made in all sorts of adaptations. The increase in the use of computers in Greece was followed by an increase in the publication of computer terminology dictionaries, translation of how-to-books and manuals for users, and “ελληνοποίηση” of screen instructions. The Academy of Athens’ Office of Scientific Terms and Neologisms (1997; former issues published in 1986, 1988, 1990, and 1994) followed the initiative of the private sector. It is impressive that all endeavors, both of the public and private sectors, converged on the same *linguistic practice*: loans had to be adapted mainly through translation. This practice was also adopted by representatives of the older camps of both *demotiki* and *katharevousa*, despite the demotic camp’s complaint about the *katharevousa* standards penetrating into the morphology of the translation loans. C) The issue of “foreignisms” gradually lost its intensity partly on account of the public involvement of several linguists who argued persistently that “borrowing is not such a bad thing,” “a language becomes enriched (or even “enlarged”) through borrowing,” and “borrowing has only passing effects.” It is mostly during this period that a “linguistic opposition” was formed (see below).

9) The official adoption of the “monotonic” (single-accent) system in 1982 did not cause panic in the beginning, at least not in the press (Fasoulioti 2004). Some critics insist that this reform was voted into law by the parliament literally “overnight,” thus pre-empting any possible reaction. A more reliable explanation for the lack of immediate reaction may be that the press was already using the new system before it was voted into law. Be it as it may, to this day there has been a strong resistance against the use of the monotonic system. Its efficiency has been challenged by certain linguists who launched their versions for a modified system (Petrounias 1984, Setatos 1998, Babiniotis 1998). The monotonic system has not been adopted by some “serious” publishers, a few newspapers and magazines, and some highly esteemed poets who still use the traditional “polytonic” (multi-accent) system. In certain conservative circles, the monotonic system is considered a “concession” to the Latin alphabet, “a step towards latinization.”

10) A cluster of separate issues relates to the use of “Greek abroad” in countries like the United States of America and the use of Greek dialects abroad such as Griko (“κατωιταλιώτικα”) in Southern Italy or Greek Cypriot in Cyprus. The case of Greek Cypriot has been extensively studied. The analysis of language attitudes expressed in the Greek Cypriot press (Karyolémou 1993, 1994a:235–338, 1994b, 2001) confirms a diglossia type difference in prestige between Standard Modern Greek and the Greek Cypriot dialect (Sciriha 1995, 1996, Papapavlou 1998). Standard Greek has assumed in Cyprus the functions of a high variety. Its use is also seen as a factor that keeps the island unified with Greece (see also Moschonas 1996, 2002).

11) There is a noticeable scarcity of publications about linguistic minorities in Greece and related issues. The code of silence about minority issues in the Greek press (“πολιτική της αποσιώπησης”) was extensively documented by Kostopoulos (2000). (See also Trudgill 2000:250–251.) The exercise of censorship or “self-censorship” precludes any open debates in the press. However, this is not only a case of “absence of entries” and “negative reports.” Fortunately, the issue surfaced on different occasions. One such occasion was a conference on issues of minority rights: see “Σεμινάριο για μειονότητες: Δημιουργεί λάθος εικόνες[,] ισχυρίζεται η ΝΔ” (*Η Καθημερινή*, 6-24-2000, p. 4); “Ερώτηση βουλευτών της Ν.Δ. στη Βουλή με θέμα το συνέδριο για τις μειονοτικές γλώσσες” (*Ελεύθερος Τύπος* 7-4-2000, p. 12); the publication and translation of Karakasidou (1997/2000) was met with considerable reserve. The outvoting in the European parliament of the “Killilea report” concerning minority languages in Europe (EP 201.963, 1-28-1994). For the most part, the issue also caused complaints that have risen due to initiatives that were not seen as “one’s own.” In the case with the Killilea report, for instance, even the Greek members of the European Parliament who voted for it, distanced themselves from the issue when they were asked by the press to give explanations for having admitted the existence of minority languages in Greece (Angelidis 2004).

12) Finally, in order to study different aspects of the issues raised, several regroupings would be necessary. *Letters to the editor* deserve to be studied as a separate genre. They reveal a large audience of concerned devotees, who consider themselves as self-appointed “guardians of the language.” *Usage columns* in Greek newspapers and periodicals also have a very long tradition, and can be seen as the response of the media to a demand for language standards in the Greek linguistic community (Moschonas 2001b). The constantly increasing number of *publications by*

“*specialists*” (rather than just “men of letters”) also deserves to be studied separately. “Specialists” (linguists, historians, and neohellenists) rarely open up an issue for public discussion but are often called in to offer their expert opinion. By studying these publications separately, one gains access to the attitudes of the elite. The emergence of a *new elite*, that is, a new group of specialists, requires particular attention. Their writings can be studied as documents of a rapidly forming *linguistic opposition* consisting of a group of persons who persistently “take the opposite side.” This linguistic opposition participates in the dynamics of the debate as it is evolving in the press; but, more often than not, the linguistic opposition’s thesis has a disempowering, *silencing* effect because it usually takes issue with the “this-is-a-non-issue” attitude.¹³

Communicative sequences

Before I look for latent presuppositions in the way the above issues are covered in the press, it must be made clear that all of the texts under study are part of *communicative sequences*. It has to be established that 1) texts are not accidentally related (due to misfiling or archival cross-referencing) and 2) texts are representative in the sense that they raise issues of some importance within the linguistic community. The term “communicative sequence” is used here with some caution. I do not use it in the pragmatologist’s sense to mean “speech events” such as the sequence of speech acts when ending a telephone conversation (Yule 1996:56–58). Nor do I use it in the sociolinguist’s or the ethnographer’s sense to mean a “communicative event” or a “communicative process” (Hymes 1974:9 ff., 129), even though a “communicative sequence” *involves* speech and communicative events in the above sense. Fairclough (1995b:37 ff.) uses the term “communicative chains” in order to describe the set of practices leading to, or being integrated in, the end product of a *mass communication event*, such as the broadcasting of a reportage. A communicative sequence could then be understood as a *chain of communicative chains*. Such chains involve several actors working on a particular subject over some period of time, exhibiting a particular “communicative ethos.” Since an analysis of the attitudes of the wider public is not offered here, I have to assume that communicative sequences (1–12) concern language issues of some salience within a community, issues on which policies are tested and decisions have to be taken, and about which an unreserved commitment is often required.

In most of the cases—especially from 1 to 7 above—the press has persistently followed a recognizable communication model, known in the literature under the rubric of “moral panic.”

A moral panic is a communicative sequence with recognizable characteristics which are described by communication scientists roughly along the following lines:¹⁴

A) *Something or someone is defined as a threat to a community's values or interests.* Usually, what is considered to pose such a threat is an official or semi-official move or initiative. For example, the official proposal to restrict the number of working languages in the E.U. organizations was seen as a threat because it excluded Greek, and was subsequently thought of as an "insult" to the "spirit" and the "manifest superiority" of the Greek language and the Greek people.¹⁵ Similarly, the inclusion of the contested meaning of the word "Bulgarian" in a dictionary that purported to record the most authoritative uses of Greek words was seen as an "unpatriotic act" that "divided the nation."¹⁶

B) *The threat is portrayed in an easily recognizable manner in the media.* "Issues" are usually patently oversimplified, over-generalized, and blown out of proportion. The initial occasion does not merit the uproar and panic that it triggers in the media. For example, the Greek newspapers, responding to the French proposal to reduce the working languages in the E.U. organizations, presented it as an "orchestrated attempt to abolish the Greek language altogether" (*Ελευθεροτυπία* 29 December 1994, p.6; *Η Καθημερινή* 29 December 1994, p.1; *Το Βήμα* 1 January 1995, p. A10). In the case of Babiniotis' dictionary, the newspapers of northern Greece saw, once again, evidence of the "peremptoriness" of an "Athens-centered state" whose edict "caused the wrath of the North" (*Μακεδονία* 26 May 1998, p. 1). In the case of "λεξιπενία," ignorance of the meanings of two "learned" words was taken as sufficient evidence to blame the Greek youth for its linguistic poverty and was seen as a symptom of the failure of the educational system ("κατάπτωση της παιδείας"), revealing "τη γυμνότητα του εκπαιδευτικού μας συστήματος και την ένδεια που χαρακτηρίζει τις παρεχόμενες γνώσεις στο ελληνικό σχολείο" (*Η Καθημερινή* 12 June 1985).

C) *The relevant articles assume a spiritual moralizing tone.* The issues are primarily seen as infringing on the spiritual, ethical status of Greek language, as well as of the state and/or the nation. For example, Babiniotis's dictionary was seen as "a new crime committed against [Greek] Macedonia" ("εθνικό κακούργημα") which proved the "σαπίλα κράτους, αγυρτία πανεπιστημιακών, θράσος, τυχοδιωκτισμός, αθηναϊκή συχασιά" (*Σπορ του Βορρά*, 23 May 1998, p. 16). In most cases, however, spiritual moralizing was dressed in a more becoming and more formulaic intellectualse. For example, "[θ]α αποτελούσε πράξη δικαίου και έκφραση ευγνωμοσύνης η εξαίρεση της Alma Matter

(Πότνια Μήτηρ) από την απειλούμενη κατάργηση. [...] [Τ]ην μία και αιώνια ελληνική γλώσσα πρέπει να τη βλέπουμε ως αισθητικό κατόρθωμα της ψυχής και του πνεύματος του λαού μας”¹⁷ (excerpt from a letter to the editor of *Η Καθημερινή*, 1-28-1995, for issue 5 above).

D) *There is a rapid build-up of public concern, followed by a response from authorities or opinion-makers.* This is mainly the case with issues 1 through 7 above. For issues 8 through 11 one could only speak of public reflexes shaped by repetition rather than by an orchestrated “crusade.” In the climate of moral panic, language issues are presented as extremely urgent and become front-page material and headline news. There is an overall significant increase in the number of reports and editorials published for a considerable period of time. The press presumes to serve a common cause by participating in a (national) debate, campaign, or crusade. In this type of campaign, there is a strong involvement of the elite. There are also many letters to the editor which represent the “general public” and, for the most part, sympathize with the elite. Thus, a “small public” acts as a representative of the “general public.”¹⁸ All of the relevant articles published are combatant, making extensive use of war metaphors, indulging in sparring matches with imaginary enemies, and share a polarized rhetoric (Delveroudi and Moschonas 1997: 83–85; 2003: 7–12). For example, in the case of the French proposal for a “five-language regime” (“καθεστώς πενταγλωσσίας”) in the European Union, the newspaper *Η Καθημερινή* (30 December 1994, p. 1) made a figurative call to arms to save the Greek language (“Σε θέση μάχης για τη γλώσσα”). Foreignisms were often considered a phenomenon of “linguistic capitulation” and their use was considered to be equivalent to “high treason”: “Σημειώνω ένα άλλο φαινόμενο γλωσσικής συνθηκολόγησης. [...] παραχωρούμε στην ξένη γλώσσα ελληνικότερες εκφράσεις, που τις κηρύσσομε ευπρόσδεκτες μεν, οθνείες όμως. [...] Για πολλές απ’ αυτές θα διαφωνούσα μη δεχόμενος γλωσσική μειοδοσία σ’ αυτή την έκταση” (A. Kanellopoulos, “Η κακοποίηση της ελληνικής γλώσσας από την ΕΡΤ (κι όχι μόνο)” *Οικονομικός Ταχυδρόμος*, 4 October 1990, p. 49, emphasis added). Columnists and correspondents alike often demanded a general mobilization of the Greeks (“κινητοποίηση,” “συστράτευση”) and a crusade (“σταυροφορία”) to save the Greek language.

E) *Finally, the panic recedes.* Moral panic over language issues rarely causes any changes of permanent value. However, it can influence legislation—as in the case of limiting the use of Latin characters in public signs—and can enforce minor reforms—as in the case of the teaching of Ancient Greek in secondary education. The restrictions

placed upon the use of Latin characters in public signs were also influenced by conceptions about the “purity” of the Greek language. An immanent result of moral panic is the public demonstration of the solidarity among the three concentric circles—the elite, the “small public” and the “general public.”

Moral panic usually recedes when articles written by the “linguistic opposition” (see category 12 above) demonstrate how the initial situation was exaggerated and its alleged threat was unduly magnified. However, it is precisely because moral panic soon abates (and is temporarily forgotten or retrospectively dismissed as yet another instance of media sensationalism) that it functions as a precondition for its own reactivation. Indeed, one can routinely detect, in most newspaper articles about language issues, the latent presumptions that cause moral panic; or one can discern the vestiges of moral panic that cannot be revived because the agitating power of the press on an issue has temporarily weakened.

If one looks at a “routine” period (i.e., a control period) during which no major moral panic took place, one will find that it is the communication model of moral panic that still determines what can *possibly count* as a “linguistic piece of news,” that is, as a candidate for initiating a communicative sequence. I present here—with the exclusion of short announcements, conference notices, and book reviews—a list of the most important “news” during the “routine” period between November 1999 and March 2000.

a) *The Greek language in the European Union.* On different occasions, members of the Greek parliament and Greek members of the European parliament protested against the proposal for a “five-language regime” (“καθεστώς πενταγλωσσίας”) that reduced to five the working languages in most E.U. organizations. A member of the Greek government filed a lawsuit with a E.U. court, demanding that Greek should be recognized as a “coequal” language.

b) *The “Macedonian” language.* The bilateral agreement between Greece and FYROM which, according to protocol requirements, was written both in Greek and in “Slav Macedonian” and was signed by the ministers of defense of the two countries in two copies, was presented by certain Greek conservative newspapers as Greek government’s *de facto* recognition of “Macedonian” as the official language in FYROM.

c) *The Greek “polytonic” system in Microsoft.* Protests and altercations occurred in the Greek parliament when the new edition of Microsoft Windows did not include the Greek “polytonic” system in its fonts. On account of these protests, Microsoft added the Greek “polytonic” system

to its fonts and announced that “it now supports Ancient Greek.” Members of the Greek parliament and the Greek press saluted Microsoft’s forced initiative, and, in this way, they participated in Microsoft’s most inexpensive advertising campaign in Greece.

d) *The Latinization of the Greek alphabet.* Protests were made against a university professor who reportedly favored the use the Latin alphabet for writing in Greek. Likewise, the President of the Greek Republic lashed out against the practice of shop owners who used the Latin alphabet for Greek names on their shop-signs. In the city of Volos, lawsuits were filed against shop owners who did not use the Greek alphabet on their shop-signs. (The influence of English on Greek was also a hot issue in position articles and “scare” columns in several newspapers.)

e) *The teaching of Greek as a second language.* Most articles on this issue were concerned with the efforts to teach Modern Greek to immigrants, repatriated Greeks, minorities, and foreigners in Greece or abroad. Several articles also favored “reinforcing” the teaching of Ancient Greek. A Greek left-wing member of the European Parliament proposed that Ancient Greek should be taught in secondary education in all the countries of the European Union. New books were written about teaching Modern Greek more efficiently to minority students in Thrace—a county in Greece with a sizeable Turkish minority. Protests were made against the Greek-Turkish mayor of a small town in Thrace when he petitioned that the curriculum of the Greek educational system should also include courses teaching Turkish as a second language to minority students.

A topology of relativism

Having shown that the bulk of the articles published in the Greek press were part of communicative sequences with recognizable characteristics, I will now turn to the “implicit frame of reference” of these articles. I will look for abstract preconceptions that surfaced in large-scale communicative sequences and for the issues that were shaped by these preconceptions.

As I said earlier, the organizing principle in all of the relevant articles is the metalinguistic maxim of language relativism, recognizable in its two aspects—spirituality and territoriality. It is precisely this maxim which set the agenda for the media and determined what counted as a major “language issue” or as a minor “linguistic news item” that was worth reporting.

Language relativism, in its strong version, has a simple (almost naïve) conceptual structure. Its tenets can be provisionally formulated as

follows: Each language has an “Interior” and an “Exterior”—*Interior* and *Exterior* being relative terms. For example, the Interior of Greek is Greek *per se* or “pure” Greek. The Exterior of Greek is “non-Greek” or English or some brand of “mixed Greek.” Loans are typically regarded as belonging to the Exterior of a language. The Interior is thought of as unified and homogeneous, knowing of no historical limits and encompassing all stages in the development of a language. It is therefore from its past that a language draws its strength; it is the past that shapes its “character.” Consequently, there is no real distinction between, say, Ancient and Modern Greek. The homogeneous Interior of Greek is kept unified, as mentioned earlier, by a single principle, a spiritual or moral force which permeates both the language and its speakers—past and present. The relationship between the Interior and the Exterior of a language is a dynamic one because either of them can expand or contract. The Interior of a language primarily expands towards its historical past. The expansions of both the Interior and the Exterior can be either “real” or “symbolic.” They can be as “real” as is the learning of a language; or they can be as “symbolic” as is the expansion of the authority and status of a language. An Interior can expand towards, or contract away from, an Exterior. Likewise, an Exterior can expand towards, or contract away from, an Interior. The case when an Exterior expands towards an Interior is typically identified as a “threat” to the language. This conception is presented schematically in Figure 1.¹⁹

Figure 1 is a pictorial representation of the idea of *language as a realm*. The ideology of a “language as a realm,” that is, the territoriality of a language, is arguably the main conception that shaped Greece’s modern ideology of monolingualism, especially after *demotic* was officially adopted. The motifs and the practices presupposed in this conceptual model were: a uniform Interior, a competitive Exterior, dividing frontier lines, purity and purism, a ban on foreignisms (“ξενηλασία”), assimilative policies in the Interior, and expansionist policies in the Exterior. The language itself was conceived as a realm.

This conception is also an organizing principle—an unconscious or pre-conscious one—that permeates the articles that appeared in the Greek press irrespectively (to a certain extent) of the political or cultural position of the newspapers. It is this organizing principle that determined what counted as a “language issue” worth including on the agenda of the media. It was this principle that determined which issues were eligible for ideological debates and the extent to which they penetrated “public opinion.” One is tempted to say that it was the principle that *generated* the “language issues.”

As a matter of fact, most of the “language issues” and the “linguistic news items” that I considered so far, were concerned with the “position”

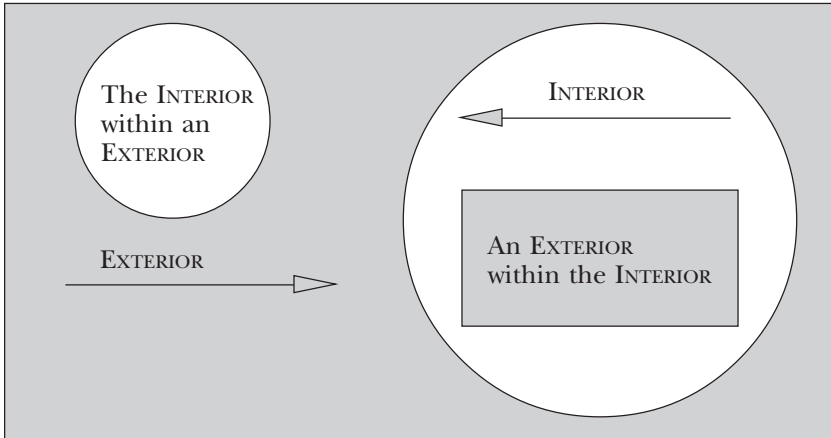


Figure 1. *Language as a realm*

of the Greek language in some real or imaginary “Exterior space.” For example, initiatives taken for the teaching of Greek as a second language to foreigners especially abroad (i.e., at the Exterior of the Greek language) were considered to be newsworthy. The “threats” facing the Greek language in the political environment of the European Union were likewise reported. I have already mentioned the case of the French proposal to reduce the number of working languages in the European organizations. The exclusion of Modern Greek from the five working languages was considered—perhaps justifiably so—as a serious threat to the Greek language. Similarly, “relinquishing” a name with a symbolic status like “Macedonia” to a “foreign enemy” was seen as newsworthy. The name “Macedonia,” which is thought of belonging only to the Interior, was used to name a part of the Exterior. Conversely, the name “Bulgarian,” that is thought of belonging to the Exterior, was used to name a part of the Interior. Newsworthy was also the expansion of the use of the Greek language into the “foreign” territory of computers. Occasionally this expansion was presented as a “conquest” *by* the Greek language. But it would be a “conquest” *of* the Greek language if the Latin alphabet was allowed to replace the Greek alphabet for writing Greek.

I have shown that some of these “language issues” occasionally acquired the communicational force of moral panic. Once again, the Greek opposition against the reduction of the working languages in the European Union clearly had the import of a “counterattack” on a “foreign enemy” in a “foreign and unfriendly” environment—that of the European Union. Both the “imagined linguistic community” of the

European Union and the languages spoken in it were seen as representing an Exterior to the Greek language and to its imagined community. According to the same conceptual model, minorities and immigrants were regarded as pathological cases by default. They represented an Exterior within an Interior, threatening the homogeneity of the Greek language and the Greek nation—hence, the assimilative attitude towards minorities. By contrast, Greek dialects spoken abroad or Greek minorities abroad were seen as an Interior within an Exterior—that is, as an “expansion” of the Interior—that should be respected and protected.²⁰

It is surmised that linguistic news is mostly *foreign* news. The distinction between Interior and Exterior coincides, to a certain degree, with the distinction between opinion and event. If the “events” and the “linguistic reality” have to do mainly with the Exterior, the opinion articles and the press commentaries are mainly concerned with the Interior of the language, its physiognomy, its proper usage and prospects. The newspaper articles that reproduced the opposition between *katharevousa* and *demotic*—two norms of the recurrent “Language Question” in Greece—can be seen as fighting over which of the two norms (and to what extent) belongs to the Interior. Also, the issue whether Ancient Greek should be taught in secondary education (recurring now in the form of the “necessity to enforce its teaching”) has always been considered from the standpoint of the homogeneity of the language. According to a rather dominant opinion, Modern Greek cannot be placed *outside* the “linguistic current” in which it belongs, a current originating in Ancient Greek. The same topology of relativism was also presupposed by the puristic attitudes towards loans, characteristic of the modern linguistic norm: purism can be seen as the attempt to keep the Interior of a language intact from foreign words or set phrases which arrive from the threatening Exterior.

The relativist model is simultaneously the representation of a conception and a topology for its manifestations. Figure 2 correlates the above mentioned issues (1–12) with their conceptual presuppositions. Issues can now be raised in the “frontiers” between languages. Language issues tend to arise mainly on the conceived boundaries. They are becoming issues of solidification and expansion. Although the Greek press is still preoccupied with the language’s Interior, new issues have arisen, such as issues of language contact and spread. Figure 2 is the map of a battlefield. Even though the traditional moralistic rhetoric has not been abandoned, the issues are presented with a newly acquired modernized touch. These modern issues are not very different from the issues raised in the fields of language contact, language spread, and language policy—all of them relatively recent fields of inquiry.

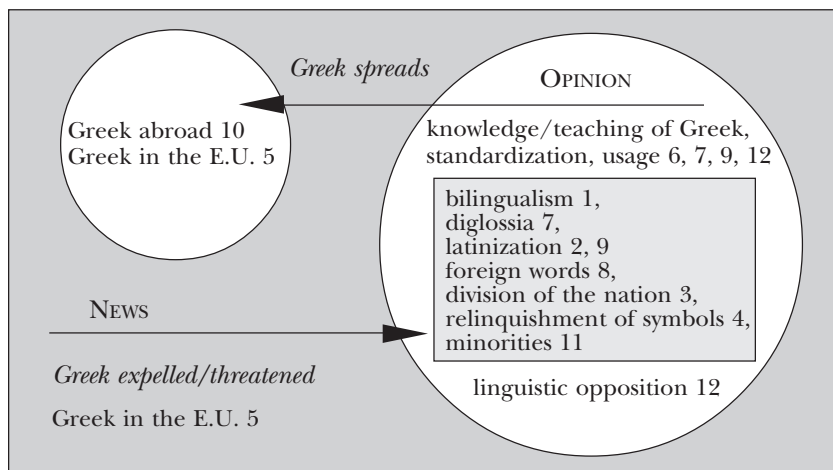


Figure 2. A map of language issues. Numbers refer to issues 1–12 in the text; see text for description of the issues.

Discussion

I have considered language relativism as a metalinguistic principle. I have also reviewed a large number of metalinguistic texts—namely articles that appeared in the Greek press about seemingly disparate language issues—as evidence for the functionality of the conceptual model that rests upon language relativism.

I have found that language relativism is indeed operative in metalinguistic discourse. It functions as an organizing principle employed to set the agenda of the press. It also functions as the common presupposition of a widespread conception of language.

If language relativism, considered as a metalinguistic maxim, is operative at the metalinguistic level of language ideology (at least in the framework of the Greek post-diglossia ideology considered here), then it can be assumed to exert a certain influence on the way “people” understand “language issues” or, at least, to affect the way in which they frame their convictions about language. As a metalinguistic maxim, relativism mainly influences the ways in which public conceptions about language are formed. It can also be assumed to exert a certain indirect influence on the way in which language itself is used and manipulated—in the sense that a believer in the purity of a language, for instance, will employ purist practices that verify his/her belief. In this double sense, language relativism can be assumed to be a maxim that proves itself. It

verifies itself by being accepted. Under these provisions, the strong version of relativism can be accepted as a “true” metalinguistic maxim.

There are several possible objections to the above conclusion. I will consider just a few. The first and main objection has to do with the “epistemological status” of relativism—i.e., whether relativism is true or not and under what conditions it can be verified or falsified. In this paper I have assumed that relativism has the status of an ideological principle. I have presented relativism as a conceptual mechanism that shapes language ideologies. In this sense, relativism is neither true nor false; it is just persuasive. The illocutionary force of relativism is to persuade, to be accepted. Its perlocutionary effect is to spread, to expand, and to influence collective conceptions and practices. Relativism is performative; it proves itself true, it verifies itself, mainly through the wide adoption of its practices within a community. Its epistemological status is not that of a belief or an assertion. The performative character of relativism is illustrated in the collective practices associated with it, mainly *purism* and *standardization*. The conception of a language’s purity, like a self-fulfilling prophecy, has the peculiar status of proving itself through the wide employment of the practice of purism. Purism is not an illusion; it is not a “false belief.” It is a practice executed collectively, often on a mass scale. Similarly, standardization “proves itself” in the many practices of its adoption and solidification as in the case of language education. Only through its spread does standardization realize itself. Relativism does not merely shape our conception of “language,” it is not just a set of assertions about language; it has a material aspect as well. It informs and forms collective linguistic practices. Possibly, the performative character of language ideologies is none other than the performative character of ideology in general (Eagleton 1991:19). Relativism employs the “performative magic of all acts of institution” (Bourdieu 1991:122). I should point out however, that, if relativism is not considered merely as a false belief or as neither true nor false, then one has to view its manifestations with a descriptive empathy. A collective practice and its ideology can be argued against or they can be contested, but they cannot be simply rejected or ridiculed. The same goes with Greece’s latest language issues, one of the many manifestations of the “spirit” of relativism.

The next two objections concern the soundness of the conceptual model emerging from the analysis of the publications in the Greek press. This model is heavily based on the concept of territoriality. Relativism, one could argue, has nothing or very little to do with the conception of a language as a realm. Rather, relativism par excellence should be identified with its spiritual version; relativism should be considered as a spiritual principle of a moralistic character.

To such an objection there are several replies. a) To begin with, spirituality and territoriality have been historically linked under relativism. It was widely assumed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (by Rousseau, Condilliac, Montesquieu, Herder, von Humboldt, and others) that the character of a language is influenced in much the same way as the character of a people—that is, by the “climate” of the region in which people live. Territorial factors were always assumed to “shape” a people’s spirit. b) Spirituality and territoriality are also linked in the more recent conception of language as a realm. A language’s realm is a spiritual one and is assumed to coincide with a state’s borders. Spirituality and territoriality are also linked in the publications considered. Moral panic would be inconceivable without any moral-spiritual conception of the “language issues.” c) “Absolutism” and its metaphor of territoriality can be shown to be the logical outcome of spirituality. If spirituality is assumed to be true, then absolutism has also to be true. If every language has a unique character, then Greek has a unique character as well, and Greek’s unique character is “contained” in Greek. Of course, the same goes for English, Turkish or Macedonian. It is true that nationalists tend to place emphasis on the unique spirit of *their* language. However, a spirit can be assumed to exist only by virtue of the more general thesis that every language has its own spirit.

Still another objection would hold that relativism could not possibly be identified with nationalism and “absolutist” conceptions of language. Relativism has been associated mainly with cultural liberalism. It has been employed by anthropologists, ethnographers, and linguists.²¹ Cultural liberalism, it is said, could be offered as a real alternative to “absolutist” conceptions. One could reply that just as nationalism tends to overlook its relativist presuppositions, cultural liberalism also tends to demote its absolutist offsprings. It is only natural that those who associate language relativism with cultural and linguistic liberalism, pluralistic language policies, linguistic tolerance and enrichment of bilingual education tend to overlook the intellectual attachment to a singular language, the obsession with a language’s territory, and the obstinate preoccupation with its purity. They also tend to overlook that this new form of “absolutism” is but the monstrous outcome of the relativism they themselves assume.

Finally, one could raise objections concerning the descriptive adequacy of the approach employed in this paper. Classification of the issues should become finer; representative excerpts should be qualitatively analyzed; correlations should be quantified. It may also turn out that “total schemes” (Davidson 1984:187) should be abandoned altogether in favor of comprehensive descriptions of the socio-cultural phenomena in question. I can only hope that my schematization of the

issues is permissible and pardonable in the context of my goal to draw a map that connects them. I might have sacrificed some of the complexity of the issues, but I have at least suggested an approach that seeks to capture language ideology in motion, in the elusive moment of its emergence and spread.

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NOTES

Acknowledgements. A shorter version of this paper was presented in the conference “Reviewing Linguistic Thought,” organized by the Faculty of English Studies of the University of Athens (Athens, May 21–24, 2002); “linguistic relativity” was one of the conference’s topics. I would like to thank I. Philippaki-Warburton, A.P.D. Mourelatos, and the two anonymous reviewers of the *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* for corrections and criticism. Archiving of articles from the Greek press has been financed by the University of Athens research grant 70/4/4131.

¹ It has been doubted whether “linguistic relativity” could even be formulated as a research hypothesis. One soon realizes that in the process of testing it, the meanings of the terms being tested inevitably mix and coalesce: “language” and “thought” cannot be kept separate in order to be correlated. For an early formulation of this critique, see Lenneberg (1953). There have been, of course, many interesting attempts to formulate linguistic relativity as a research hypothesis, such as Lucy’s (1992b) and, most recently, Levinson’s (2003). See also Gumperz and Levinson (1996). I cannot pause to speculate whether the acceptance of linguistic relativity as a second-order maxim has any bearing on its testing as a first-order hypothesis. I conclude, following Silverstein (1985:220), that certain prescriptive practices related to language relativism, such as purism, can be assumed to “monitor” language behavior and to exert an indirect influence on language structure and evolution.

² On the growing literature on language ideologies, see Woolard and Schieffelin (1994) and Woolard (1998). The field of language ideology is related to critical sociolinguistics, language planning and policy (Williams 1992, Mesthrie et al. 2000); the study of language attitudes (Baker 1992), (Critical) Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1995a, van Dijk 1998b:191–312), and “folk linguistics” (Niedzielski and Preston 2000). Silverstein’s (1979) has been one of the most influential papers in this field. See also Silverstein (1985, 1993, 1998).

³ The term, coined by Heinz Kloss, is cited by Haarmann (1991:105).

⁴ Of course, the significance of other types of discourse cannot be underestimated. See Herzfeld (1982) on folklore studies; Tziouvas (1986) on literary criticism; Skopetea (1988) on history; Athanassopoulou (2002) on archaeology. Herzfeld (1996) refers specifically to Greek notions of “spirit” and the “essentializing” they presuppose.

⁵ On the affinities of the Psycharists with Herder’s thought concerning the “nature” of language, see Tziouvas (1986:104–129).

⁶ For a standard reference to the role of the elites in the formation of language ideology, see Fishman (1989). The schema employed here has been adapted from Thomas (1991:100–114). The tripartite division between “elites,” “small public,” “general public”

tends to overlook the dynamic and dialectic element in the overlapping of the various publics. Certainly, elites in their role as “journalists” talk at a lower register in order to achieve a higher degree of popularity. By the same token, journalists (as representatives of a wider public) often talk up as if they were omniscient, a power they derive from their middle position in the social hierarchy, which accounts both for their “borrowed” erudition and its stereotypical, cliché manifestation. Much more could be said about the social organization of language ideologies from the standpoint of the “sociology of knowledge” and the “symbolic structure of power” (Joseph 1992).

⁷ My research is based on an archive of articles from Greek newspapers and magazines. The publications I consider cover more than two decades (1980–2001). The years 2000–2001 have been covered in full (3,500+4,500 entries respectively). The earlier period of 1990–1999 is covered by a representative sample from the newspapers with the widest circulation (about 1,500 articles). Issues that stirred up intense public concern over a continuous period of time (mainly issues 1–7) are considered in detail. All relevant publications (10,000 articles overall) were summarized and classified by author, place and date of publication, genre, topic, cross-references, and keywords. My paper draws from a pilot study (Moschonas 2001) which considers in detail the publications during a three-month period (November 1999 through January 2000). This period was extended in my paper here until March 2000). A presentation of particular cases that aroused intense public concern will appear in *Γλώσσα* 59 (Moschonas 2004).

⁸ In her interview (*Η Καθημερινή* 18 November 2001, p. 8) Diamantopoulou points out that, in the enlarged E.U., twenty official languages will be in use. It is impossible for all of them to be employed as “work languages” (γλώσσες εργασίας) in all of the E.U. organizations. Only a few languages could be employed in the framework of an inter-European education based on the exchange of students and teachers. Diamantopoulou concludes that Greece is threatened by language exclusion (γλωσσικός αποκλεισμός), which can be precluded only through the adoption of English as a “second official language.” In the face of the reactions caused, the proposal was “clarified” with a new statement (20 November 2001), according to which “the official state has to ensure that citizens become fluent in languages” and that “English should be made available as an instrument of communication, learning and work for everybody.” Both the initial and the revised proposal were condemned by almost everybody: by ex-president Christos Sartzetakis, by members of the parliament, the Church, various societies (such as the “Society for the Internationalization of the Greek Language”), academicians, linguists, men of letters, journalists, and readers.

⁹ The letter was published and commented upon in all the wide-circulation newspapers. Here are some representative extracts: “Τον τελευταίο καιρό έχει αρχίσει να εκδηλώνεται μια τάση να αντικατασταθεί το ελληνικό αλφάβητο από το λατινικό. Η τάση αυτή γίνεται φανερή κυρίως σε κείμενα παραγόμενα από ηλεκτρονικούς υπολογιστές [...] [H] προσπάθεια αυτή [...] θα καταφέρει καίριο πλήγμα κατά της ελληνικής σκέψης και όλων των πτυχών του ελληνικού πολιτισμού [...] Η γλώσσα μας, η αρχαιότητα αλλά πάντα σύγχρονη και ζώσα, αυτή η γλώσσα που εμπλούτισε όχι μόνο τη λατινική, αλλά και τις κυριότερες ευρωπαϊκές γλώσσες, που έχει και οπτικά συνδεθεί άρρηκτα με το αλφάβητό μας, δεν είναι δυνατόν να υποστή μείωση με την κατάργησή του από εμάς του ίδιους. [...] Θεωρούμε ανόσια αλλά και ανόητη κάθε προσπάθεια να αντικατασταθεί η ελληνική γραφή στο λίκνο της. [...] [Θ]α αντισταθούμε καλώντας όλους τους συνέλληνες ν’ αντιδράσουν για την πρόρριζα [sic] εξαφάνιση των ανίερων αυτών σχεδίων” (“Σήμα κινδύνου από σαράντα ακαδημαϊκούς,” *Η Καθημερινή* 1-7-2001, p. 4). This call for a crusade was taken over by several columnists the following days. However, the fears of the academicians were soon judged to be insubstantial by more prestigious members of the elite: see, for example, E. Kriaras, “Η φοβία για το αλφάβητο,” *Η Καθημερινή* 2-11-2001, p. 53: “Για μένα, όπως και για κάθε, νομίζω,

πνευματικό πρόσωπο που αντιμετωπίζει το θέμα, ο κίνδυνος είναι ανύπαρκτος. Πρόκειται στην ουσία για πραγματική σκιαμαχία που διαδηλώνει μια έκδηλη συντηρητικότητα.” E. Kriaras himself has been the target of accusations for his 1982 orthographic reform adopting the “monotonic system,” considered by some as a “step towards Latinization.”

¹⁰ The case of “Μακεδονικό” has been widely discussed from the perspectives of foreign policy (Zahariadis 1996), media ideology (Armenakis et al. 1996, Panagiotopoulou 1996), and media discourse (Kitis and Milapides 1997).

¹¹ The status of “Standard Modern Greek” has been extensively documented in many widely cited works: Triandaphyllidis et al. (1941), Setatos (1973), Browning (1982), Kazazis (1968, 1992, 1993), Mackridge (1985), Horrocks (1997:262–365), Holton, Mackridge & Philippaki-Warbuton (1997). Standard Modern Greek is assumed to comprehend elements of both demotic and learned origin. All of the works cited employ distinctions between “learned” (λόγια) and “demotic” (λαϊκά) forms at all levels of grammatical analysis (vocabulary and collocation, phonology, morphology, syntax).

¹² For some of the early post-diglossia issues, see Landsman (1989). Diglossia and language reform can now be considered more appropriately as frames of reference for many of the subsequent language debates rather than as issues that have themselves the force to cause moral panic. By the end of the 1980s, the debates on the “language problem,” the “quality problem” and *katharevousa* were over. Only their echo is heard now. The twin educational issues (“how to teach Modern Greek” and “whether Ancient Greek should be taught in secondary education”) have also been the subject of several semi-scientific books and papers—which could also be studied from the perspective of their ideological presuppositions. Koksaraki (2000) is the only empirical study employing operational definitions on the issue whether or not the teaching of Ancient Greek contributes to the “language improvement” of students in secondary education. Her conclusions are negative.

¹³ Demythologizing discourse can itself be mythological. Linguists who comment on the presuppositions of common metalinguistic discourse share their own presuppositions, often presented as blatant truths of the science of linguistics (e.g., in Haris 2001). For example, “languages evolve naturally,” “all languages are equal,” etc.

¹⁴ The apt term “moral panic” has been coined by the criminologist J. Young and established by Cohen (1972); cf. Thompson (1998). D. Cameron (1995:78–115) analyzes “grammar crusades” in terms of moral panic and introduces the term in the growing literature on language ideologies.

¹⁵ “[Δεν] δέχομαι να μπαίνει [η ελληνική γλώσσα] στο ίδιο τσουβάλι, φερ’ ειπείν, με την πορτογαλική, που δεν είναι παρά μία ακόμη ‘διάλεκτος’ της λατινικής. Η ελληνική είναι η μητέρα όλων των γλωσσών, ακόμη και της λατινικής. Το να εξαιρείται λοιπόν η μητέρα από το σύνολο των υπολοίπων γλωσσών είναι ένα φαινόμνο τουλάχιστον αντιπνευματικό. [...] ‘Άξιζε περισσότερος σεβασμός στη γλώσσα στην οποία βρίσκονται οι ρίζες χιλιάδων ξένων ευρωπαϊκών λέξεων” (I. Kambanelis, *Έθνος* 30 December 1994, p. 8).

¹⁶ “Σοx! Ανατριχιαστικό! Οι πολίτες-φιλαθλοι της Θεσσαλονίκης έμειναν με ανοιχτό το στόμα! Τι άλλο μπορούν να περιμένουν; Ο καθηγητής, Γιώργος Μπαμπινιώτης, υπεύθυνος για πολλές αλλαγές στην παιδεία, τους βαπτίζει Βούλγαρους! [...] Το κομπλεξικό αυτό μπαίνει σε όλα τα σχολεία, σε κάθε βιβλιοθήκη και σε κάθε ελληνικό σπίτι. Δηλητηριάζει τα παιδιά μας, νομιμοποιεί κάθε ανεγκέφαλο ανθέλληνα και προσβάλλει βάνουσα την εθνική μας ταυτότητα και την εθνική μας καταγωγή. Ποτέ δεν περιμέναμε ότι ένας καθηγητής γλωσσολογίας, σύμβουλος του υπουργού Παιδείας, θα παρουσιαζόταν πιο ανεγκέφαλος και από τον τελευταίο οπαδό της πιο καυτής κερκίδας! Αλήθεια, είστε Έλληνας κύριε Μπαμπινιώτη; Τα τηλεφωνα της «Θ» πήραν φωτιά! Έγιναν αλεξικέραυνο αγανάκτησης χιλιάδων αναγρωστών: Είναι ελάχιστο

καθήκον μας να καταγράψουμε τα Ρίχτερ οργής που προκάλεσε! Φτάνει πια! Έφτασε η ώρα του εισαγγελέα!” (“Αηδία! Ρίχτερ Οργής!”, *Θεσσαλονίκη* 23 May 1998, p. 104).

¹⁷ Babiniotis (1994a and 1994b) are collections of significant occasional papers, which have largely contributed to the rationalization and legitimation of a moral, spiritual and judgmental approach to the Modern Greek language (“αξιολογική προσέγγιση της γλώσσας”: 1994a:295–306).

¹⁸ In the late 1980s the media writers were not as many as they are now. Accordingly, expert opinion tended to be more personalized. For example, the issue of the “quality of the language” has been raised mainly by Babiniotis (1994b). By the same token, expert opinion appeared to be less representative. The number of columnists has considerably increased in the meantime. Most regular columnists feel now entitled to write occasionally on this or that language issue. Since an adequate number of persons are nowadays involved in bringing forth and sustaining an issue, a “spread of the opinion” effect is much more easily achieved.

¹⁹ The conceptual scheme presented here could be represented either as a “frame” or as a “script” (Barsalou 1992). It certainly involves several related “*idées reçues*” about language, such as the rejection of the diachrony-synchrony dichotomy (cf. the issue of the Modern *vs.* the Ancient language); the complete identification of a language with its writing system (reactions to “monotonic”); the conception of a language as a word depository and the concomitant adoption of a nomenclaturist theory of reference (cf. “Macedonian,” “Bulgarian”); the idea of languages as distinct and total entities and the rejection of language continua (cf. foreignisms, dialects); the understanding of language contact and multilingualism as pathological phenomena (cf. issues 1 and 8); and so on. Let us also note that the opposition between “interior” and “exterior” can coincide, in the frame of a language ideology, with parallel oppositions such as “us” *vs.* “others” (a social opposition) and “right” *vs.* “wrong” (a linguistic opposition); cf. Delveroudi and Moschonas (1997:79–80, 2003:2–3: “*dialectique sociale*” *vs.* “*dialectique linguistique*”); van Dijk (1998a:25: “group ideologies [...] are polarized”).

²⁰ The Cypriot dialect may be an interesting exception to this rule, at least in Cyprus, since Cypriot’s vitality has been considered, mainly by extreme nationalists, as an obstacle to the spread of a common language (of a “*πανελληνικά γλώσσα*”) in Cyprus (Karyolémou 1994a:303).

²¹ “Consciously or unconsciously, [most sociolinguists] are the disciples of Herder and Whorf,” proclaimed J. Fishman (1989:3). It should not be assumed that the conceptual topology presented here occurs only in prescientific discourse, or that it is restricted in some kind of “folk linguistics,” with all its worth as a *curiosité*. Certainly, language relativism is immanent in most ideologies of standardization. It surfaces in mediated discourse—such as the discourse in and through the press about language—and it is often invoked in situations of language conflict. Arguably, it is also widespread among linguists working in certain fields of “cultural,” “cognitive” or “anthropological linguistics” (Palmer 1996:114–169) and it is often presupposed in studies of language death, language contact, and language planning.

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