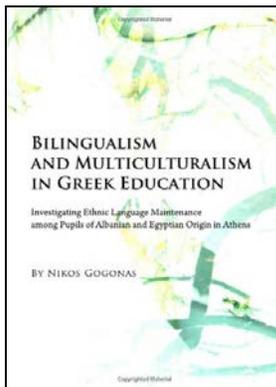


Professional Book Review

Gogonas, N. (2010). *Bilingualism and Multiculturalism in Greek Education: Investigating Ethnic Language Maintenance among Pupils of Albanian and Egyptian Origin in Athens*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholar Publishing. 261 pp., ISBN-10: 1443821381, ISBN-13: 9781443821384. \$59.99.

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The surge in Albanian and Egyptian immigration to Greece in the 1990's provides the inspiration for Gogonas' latest study, an exploration of the desirability of multiculturalism and bilingualism within the Greek educational system. This study represents the first attempt to carefully examine the Greek educational system's receptivity to providing bilingual educational opportunities for elementary and secondary schools students from immigrant households in Athens. Gogonas focuses his attention on two immigrant groups, Albanians and Egyptians (including both Coptic Christians and Muslims), but readily concedes the limited data on which he is able to base his discussion of the experiences of the latter. This limitation makes the work far more valuable as a case study of Albanian students, though still worthy as a whole for its original treatment of the education of ethnic minorities in Greece.

In Chapter One, Gogonas identifies the three factors which help sustain ethnolinguistic vitality: demography, status, and institutional support. Addressing demography, Gogonas notes that Albanians are not concentrated in any particular area of Athens, making their dispersion an obstacle to the preservation of their language. A clear discussion of the spatial geographical distribution of Egyptians in Athens, however, is missing. In discussing status, Gogonas observes that Albanians are "stigmatized on the grounds of *criminal behavior*" (p. 23), while Egyptians enjoy a more favorable reputation in Greek society. The last variable, institutional support, is largely nonexistent, given the absence of bilingual education for minority students. In Chapter Two, Gogonas asserts that Greek schools employ a strictly monolingual approach in order to fully assimilate immigrant students by facilitating renunciation of their cultures. Gogonas supplies empirical data to substantiate his claim that intercultural schools are virtually nonexistent, as they only "constitute 0.17% of the total state schools while the number of migrant and repatriated pupils approximates 10% of the total school population" (p. 47).

Chapter Three explains the specific procedures of a pilot study conducted in Athens from January to December of 2005. Albanian, Egyptian, and Greek students participated in interviews, along with Greek teachers and parents from

the minority groups. Gogonas also administered the Subjective Vitality Questionnaire, originally designed by Bouhris *et al.* (1981). The mean age of students in this data analysis procedure was 13.5 years. Predictably, data for Egyptian students were limited, due to difficulty in locating members of this category. Besides the Subjective Vitality Questionnaire, the two main topics addressed in all other questionnaires and interviews related to background and linguistic information (part 1) and subjective ethnolinguistic vitality (part 2). Notably, each questionnaire and interview was conducted in Greek. Gogonas completed his study in the following areas of Athens: four schools in Elefsina (a working-class area) and Kifisia (an upper-class location). Teachers in the pilot study were interviewed regarding their position on providing a multicultural education in schools and parents were asked about the importance of maintaining a bilingual household. The results of the questionnaires and interviews are scattered throughout the subsequent chapters, making them difficult to grasp at times.

In chapters four through six, Gogonas presents several views sure to arouse controversy. First, in Chapter Four, he characterizes the Greek educational system as xenophobic, based primarily on the harrowing experiences of immigrants recorded in the interviews and questionnaires. Because of pervasive discrimination in schools, he argues, Albanians have been forced to assume new identities. Egyptians, however, face less hostility and have an easier time assimilating. In Chapter Five, Gogonas presents the following research findings: "Egyptian pupils report a better command of the Greek language than their parental language in all four skills (understanding, speaking, reading, and writing). However, Egyptian pupils' writing skills in Arabic seem to exceed Albanian pupils' writing skills in Albanian" (p. 97). In essence, Gogonas concludes that Egyptians are more enthusiastic about learning their respective mother tongue than are Albanians. When comparing Muslim and Christian Egyptian households, Gogonas finds that Muslim Egyptians are more inclined to speak Arabic at home, while the Coptic Christian Egyptians are more enthusiastic about conversing in Greek. Gogonas attributes this tendency to religious considerations, perhaps an affinity between the Orthodox Christian Greeks and the Coptic Christian Egyptians. In Chapter Six, Gogonas states that Greeks hold the view that their culture is superior to all others. Moreover, Gogonas denies the continuity between classical and modern Greek languages. He blames the Greek educational system for clinging to the glory of its ancient past. In Chapter Seven, Gogonas reports on how immigrant groups find that their native languages are completely neglected in schools, with the parents feeling as if the educational system has alienated them altogether. Finally, interviews with teachers indicate that they perceive the languages of immigrant groups to be problematic because bilingualism hinders students' ability to learn Greek.

Gogonas' contention that Greek textbooks, which emphasize a link between the classical and modern Greek languages, facilitate educational chauvinism has not been convincingly proven. Likewise, his suggestion in Chapter Six that it is pedagogically improper for educators to teach the continuity

of classical Greek is uncorroborated. Gogonas, neither a classicist nor a linguist, lacks the qualifications to speak conclusively on the historical evolution of the Greek language. Moreover, his criticism of the Greek educational system for emphasizing the similarities between classical and modern Greek ignores the historical fact that the ancient Greek language, as noted by John Chadwick, enjoys a continuous history of nearly three millennia, a record rivaled only by Chinese.

Despite these reservations, I believe that this book should be read by anyone interested in the state of affairs of both bilingual and minority education in Greece. Although offering iconoclastic historical views on some matters, Gogonas makes out a convincing case for increased multiculturalism. My hope is that this book will inspire more case studies on the education of immigrant groups in Greece, and perhaps even a separate study on Egyptian immigrants, about whom data were particularly difficult to gather.