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# INVESTIGATING LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS GREEK AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN AN INTERCULTURAL SCHOOL

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## ABSTRACT

*The aim of this paper is to present the findings of a study regarding the students' attitudes to learn Greek as a second language within the framework of Greek intercultural education. It further seeks to explore the relationship of this psychological construct with their level in the Greek language. The findings indicate that to a great extent the students who exhibited integrative and instrumental orientations were the ones of an advanced proficiency level. The paper concludes with pedagogical and teaching recommendations based on the findings and suggestions for further research.*

**Keywords:** attitudes, L2 community, Greek as a second language, intercultural education

## 1. Introduction

Attitudes are the cornerstone in determining our view of the world. In addition, they are responsible for the shaping of our perception of the world and the response to the various entities around us (Oppenheim, 1998). Due to the key role that attitudes play in our society and lives, it is apparent that the study of attitudes has a long history.

The original impetus for the study of attitudes and motivation can be traced in the grounds of social psychology and namely in the pioneering work of Gardner and Lambert (1972), which paved the way for empirical research into L2 motivational research. Gardner (1985: 6) asserts that "students' attitudes towards the specific language group are bound to influence how successful they will be in incorporating aspects of that language". Thus, favourable affective disposition toward the target linguistic group offers opportunities for greater successful learning outcomes. Research carried out in this field has brought to light findings that corroborate Gardner's position, suggesting that there is a link between proficiency and the attitudes held toward the second language and the L2 community (Gardner, 1985). In particular, Gardner and Lambert (1972) conducted a series of studies which delved into learners' attitude toward the French speaking culture and the possible impact on the learners' motivation to learn the target culture and student achievement. What is prevalent in Gardner and Lambert's (1972) contribution to the study of second language motivation is the distinction between two types of orientation: integrative and instrumental. The former refers to an individual's desire to identify with the members of the speech community, to interact with them and to understand them, whereas the latter denotes the individual's desire to learn the language in order to improve his/her professional status, to pursue studies in that country, or to serve a certain utilitarian purpose. In his socio-educational model, Gardner (1985) identifies that motivation comprises three elements: effort, want and affect, while acknowledging the existence of certain other constituents: 1) the social milieu, (2) individual differences, (3) second language acquisition contexts and (4) outcomes.

The socio-educational model, however, has seen its share of criticism (Dörnyei, 1994, 2001a, 2001b, 2005; Oxford and Shearin, 1994). One of the points raised concerns that the distinction between integrative and instrumental orientation is specific to bilingual settings. Researchers have stressed the need to delve into contexts where English is taught as a foreign language. Results from studies carried out in EFL contexts have suggested that learners show instrumental orientation due to the limited contact with the native speakers or the target culture (Dörnyei, 1990, Oxford and Shearin, 1994, Warden and Lin, 2000). Thus, the impact of the context on L2 learning attitudes and motivation has been greatly stressed in the literature.

Various aspects have attracted researchers' attention by pointing directly to the relationship between second language learners' attitudes towards language learning and achievement behaviour (Ames & Ames, 1984; Csizér and Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei, 2000, 2001a, 2005; Guilloteaux, 2007; Lanara, 1999; Zimmerman and Schunk, 2001), parental influence and support (Gardner, 1985; Kormos, Kiddle and Csizér, 2011) and the age of learners (Muñoz and Tragant, 2001; Nikolov, 1999; Sougari and Iliopoulou, 2011).

Previous research has highlighted the basic constituents of attitudes towards L2 learning. Even though the findings (Wenden 2001; Hurd 1998; Cotterall 1995) that stress the correlation between attitudes and learning outcomes abound, there is still no sufficient information regarding how learners of different proficiency levels respond to the target linguistic-cultural group within the second language context. Thus, this study aims to contribute to the on-going research in the field of attitudes and motivation to learn Greek as a second language in a truly intercultural setting where Greek is both the subject taught and the medium of instruction in all subjects within the school curriculum of an intercultural lower secondary school.

### **1.1 Intercultural education in the Greek education setting**

During the last three decades, Greece has experienced an immigration flow that has significantly changed the characteristics of the population; most changes are apparent on the social, economic, racial, ethnic, educational and religious level. The impact on the educational level cannot be underestimated as this particular sector has been called to respond to the great diversity present in the classroom. Thus, in light of the fairly recent situation, the Greek education system has experienced various changes in order to respond to the demands of society (Triandafyllidou and Gropas, 2007).

In the early days (1990s), reception classes (made up mainly by repatriates and their descendants and other foreign nationals) were arranged with a view to addressing the various educational, cultural and linguistic needs of newcomers. In the mid 1990s, a comprehensive legislative framework was put forward and the foundations for intercultural education were set (Law 2416/65). Since then, 26 intercultural schools have been established as a special category of schools; in these schools, reception classes for students who have little or no prior knowledge of Greek are also hosted. Even though there is no curriculum developed to specifically address and respond to the needs and knowledge of this student population, intercultural schools rather follow the mainstream curriculum of regular ones; in these schools, the teachers are asked to cater for the individual needs of the students.

## **2. Research methodology**

### **2.1 Aim of the study and research questions**

This study reports on the findings based on a questionnaire survey that investigated lower secondary students' attitudes studying Greek as a second language in an intercultural education setting. The results of a previous study (Sougari and Iliopoulou, 2011), which investigated the same student population, focused on delineating the students' motives on learning Greek as a second language. The conclusion drawn from that study highlighted that the students were not integratively- but rather instrumentally-motivated. Thus, it was considered important to investigate further these students' attitudes in order to examine the impact that the proficiency level has on their orientation. With a view at unraveling the attitudes that these students espouse so as to design a course that is tailored made to their needs, certain questions need to be addressed:

1. What is the impact of the students' level in Greek on their attitudes toward the Greek language?
2. Is there a relationship between proficiency level and the type of attitude held by second language learners within the framework of intercultural education?

#### **2.1.1 Participants**

To gain a better understanding of second language learners' attitudes toward the Greek language and the Greek situational context, the study focused on whether there is a relationship between the students' proficiency level, while following the practices of an intercultural lower secondary school and their attitudes towards the language in general. As regards the participants, 99 students took part in this study, while being equally distributed in the three grades of the lower secondary school, that is, 1<sup>st</sup>

grade: N=33, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade: N=33 and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade: N= 33. The study was conducted toward the end of the school year so as to ensure that all learners had adequate experience with the Greek language and the Greek style of living. Upon enrolment in the school, the students sit for the National Certificate in Greek (even though there is no official approval regarding this procedure) and subsequently are placed to the appropriate group according to their placement (i.e. beginner, intermediate and advanced). Thus, based on the students' differentiation in terms of their proficiency level, we can discern the following pattern: 1<sup>st</sup> grade: Beginners – 35%, Intermediate – 30% and Advanced – 35%; 2<sup>nd</sup> grade: Beginners – 26% and Advanced – 74%; and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade: Beginners - 29% and Advanced – 71%). With particular reference to the country of origin, the sample reflects great diversity: the majority of the students come from Albania and Georgia, being 23% and 22% respectively, whereas to a lesser extent they originate from countries such as Afghanistan (17%), Russia (9%), China (8%), Skopje (6%), Mauritania (4%), New Guinea (2%) and various other countries (9%). The sample consisted of 67% male and 33% female students; the higher presence of male students reflects the higher migration rate of males, while their families remain in their country of origin. In addition, the participants' age ranges from 13 to 18. Prior schooling received is a parameter that is acknowledged upon allocation and that is why older students such as Afghani have been allocated to the lower secondary school due to their enrolment up to the primary sector in their country of origin.

### **2.1.2 Data collection instrument and data analysis**

Second language learners' attitudes toward the Greek language and the Greek cultures were captured with the help of an adapted version of the questionnaire proposed by Dornyei, Csizer and Nemeth (2006), which originally aimed at investigating second language learners' attitudes towards various target linguistic groups. The questionnaire was pilot tested and various changes were implemented in order to make it appropriate for the given situational context, bearing in mind the need to render the questionnaire accessible to the learners of all proficiency levels. Thus, particular attention was paid to the wording of each statement. In the case of beginners, the same questionnaire was administered in an English version so as to cater for those learners who could be regarded as low proficiency learners in Greek but had good prior knowledge in English. The questionnaire was administered to the students in class so as one of the researchers to be available for further clarification.

With specific reference to the various items of the questionnaire, it should be mentioned that the questionnaire is divided into three parts: part A elicits the bio data of the participants which allowed for the sketching of the learners' profile, namely: age, gender, country of origin, mother tongue, parents' knowledge of Greek, years of residence in Greece, knowledge of other languages, etc.; part B delves into the problems learners encounter when learning Greek and how they cope with them; and part C examines learners' attitudes towards the Greek language, the Greek culture, the language community, their disposition to seek employment in Greece and their desire to use Greek in their communication exchanges. The statements in Part C are replied in the form of a 5-point rating scale where 1 stands for strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for neither agree nor disagree, 4 for agree and 5 for strongly agree.

As regards the statistical analysis, the data underwent processing while adopting the Kruskal Wallis test, the non-parametric test, which is performed on ranked data by reflecting the relative strength of the variability in the ranks among the three possible conditions (i.e. beginners, intermediate and advanced). In the case where two independent samples (i.e. beginners and advanced) were present, the Mann Whitney U test was applied in order to determine if a difference exists between the two groups. The significance level was set at <.05.

## **3. Results**

The present study focuses on students' attitudes that learn Greek as a second language by seeking whether there is association between their attitudes towards the Greek language and the Greek target-linguistic group and their overall proficiency in Greek. The results are looked upon with a view of delineating two sets of attitudes: namely, the integrative and instrumental orientation based on Gardner and Lambert's distinction (1972).

### 3.1 In search of students' integrative orientation

In the literature, integrative orientation has been regarded as the most crucial factor in motivating an individual to strive towards successful learning outcomes. To what extent is the learners' level of proficiency in alliance with their desire to identify with the target group and their appreciation of the various cultural activities? Thus, this study attempts to uncover second language learners' attitude toward their desire to assimilate in the host country and disposition towards the Greek language and the Greek cultural artifacts.

*Statement 1: I would like to live in Greece*

In reply to this statement, those students attending the first grade in the lower secondary intercultural school showed quite different ratings of their future plans as regards their desire to reside in Greece. There was no agreement among the three proficiency levels and that is why a significant difference emerged. It also becomes apparent that the beginners gave a higher mean ranking than the other two groups. In the case of the 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, it can also be deduced that the mean ranks that beginners reported are much higher than those of the advanced group, thus indicating a significant result (see Table 1).

	Attitude	Level <sup>1</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> grade K W <sup>2</sup>			2 <sup>nd</sup> grade MW U <sup>3</sup> test			3 <sup>rd</sup> grade M W U test		
			MR <sup>4</sup>	M <sup>5</sup>	p	MR	M	p	MR	M	p
1	I would like to live in Greece	B	22.08	4.83	.000	16.88	4.00	n.s.	22.00	5.00	.003
		I	21.44	4.78							
		A	8.58	3.33		17.04	3.84		13.75	4.40	
2	I like Greeks	B	16.00	2.17	.000	12.06	2.62	n.s.	9.81	1.77	.000
		I	29.00	4.89							
		A	9.00	1.17		18.58	3.44		21.68	3.05	
	I would like to identify with Greeks	B	13.67	1.58	.000	24.38	3.75	.010	12.81	1.46	.034
		I	28.67	4.78							
		A	11.58	1.50		14.64	2.16		19.72	2.55	
4	I like the Greek language	B	9.17	1.42	.000	8.88	2.38	.004	11.00	1.54	.003
		I	25.33	3.89							
		A	18.58	2.42		19.78	3.92		20.90	3.15	
5	I like the Greek culture	B	13.79	1.58	.004	8.31	1.38	.003	13.50	1.77	n.s.
		I	25.72	2.89							
		A	14.08	1.67		19.78	3.32		19.28	2.65	
6	I like Greek films	B	13.38	3.00	.003	8.50	1.88	.003	13.15	3.08	.046
		I	25.72	4.56							
		A	14.08	3.08		19.72	3.72		19.50	3.65	
7	I like Greek music	B	11.50	2.92	.001	9.69	2.62	.012	14.08	3.08	n.s.
		I	25.83	4.56							
		A	15.88	3.33		19.34	3.76		18.90	3.85	

**Table 1** Learners' integrative orientation

<sup>1</sup> B: beginners, I: intermediate, A: advanced, <sup>2</sup> K W: Kruskal Wallis, <sup>3</sup> M W U test: Mann Whitney U test, <sup>4</sup> MR: mean rank, <sup>5</sup> M: mean

*Statement 2: I like Greeks*

The respondents' reaction to this statement revealed that first graders across the various levels showed very distinct attitudes towards their positive orientation towards Greeks, thus, reflecting completely disparate views. It appears that intermediate students ranked this much higher in their priorities than the other two groups. Support for this statement is evident in 3<sup>rd</sup> graders' responses, while advanced learners tended to give a higher mean ranking than their beginner counterparts (see Table 1).

*Statement 3: I would like to identify with Greeks*

In Table 1, significant findings highlight students' attitudes towards their desire to identify with Greeks. Bearing in mind the age of the respondents and the fact that their contact with the people in the host country was not made available until their adolescence, the respondents' reaction to this statement brings to light quite contradictory results, rendering the deduction of specific conclusions quite impossible. First graders showed significant differences in their mean rankings, with intermediate

students giving higher mean ranking in their priorities against the rest of their classmates. In the case of second graders, beginners gave a higher mean ranking than the advanced group, whereas in the case of third graders, the advanced learners appeared to give a higher mean ranking than their beginner counterparts.

*Statement 4: I like the Greek language*

A look at Table 1 makes quite apparent that the students belonging to the various proficiency levels of each grade showed quite different attitudes as encapsulated in their responses. Significant differences emerged in all cases indicating that more advanced students reported a higher mean ranking of their attitude toward the Greek language. Only in the case of the first graders did the intermediate group offer a higher mean ranking than the other two groups.

*Statement 5: I like the Greek culture*

In the case of the three proficiency levels in Grade 1, the intermediate group exhibited a higher mean ranking than the other two groups in response to the statement: 'I like the Greek culture'. More favourable attitudes emerge on the part of the advanced group of Grade 2 who differentiated from their beginner counterparts. As far as the students attending Grade 3 are concerned, they displayed similar attitudes and no significant differences emerged.

*Statement 6: I like Greek films*

The response to this statement brings to light similar attitudes as the ones presented in the previous statement. Advanced learners belonging to the second and the third grade responded in favour of Greek films, while giving quite distinct answers in relation to those provided by the beginner group in the respective grade. Once more, with particular reference to the first graders, the students attending the various proficiency-leveled classes showed quite different replies and significant differences emerged, while revealing that intermediate students offered a higher mean ranking than the rest.

*Statement 7: I like Greek music*

Similar to the previous statement, significant differences appeared in the case of first graders with the intermediate group professing to like the Greek music more than the rest of their counterparts. The difference between beginners and the advanced group among second graders is statistically significant, whereas among third graders a non-significant result was rendered, revealing similar attitudes towards Greek music.

### **3.2 In search of students' instrumental orientation**

The following set of statements pertains to the sphere of instrumental orientation which relates to a person's attitude toward learning the Greek language while striving for the attainment of certain utilitarian goals, such as satisfying a job prospect, obtaining a proficiency certificate and achieving communication goals.

*Statement 8: I would like to find a job in Greece*

As regards the desire to satisfy future occupational activity, first graders showed quite distinct attitudes, where beginners gave a higher mean ranking to this priority, showing that this is one of their main goals. Statistical significant results surfaced in the case of the students comprising the two groups (i.e. beginners and advanced) of second and third graders. However, in the former, the advanced group offered a higher mean ranking, whereas in the latter, beginners were more in favor of finding a job in Greece (see Table 2).

	Attitude	Level <sup>1</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> grade K W <sup>2</sup>			2 <sup>nd</sup> grade MW U <sup>3</sup> test			3 <sup>rd</sup> grade M W U test		
			MR <sup>4</sup>	M <sup>5</sup>	p	MR	M	p	MR	M	p
8	I would like to find a job in Greece	B I A	21.17 17.28 12.68	4.83 4.56 3.17	0.41	11.50 18.76	2.62 3.96	.045	21.50 14.08	5.00 4.05	.006
9	I would like to attain a certificate	B I A	26.50 13.61 10.04	5.00 3.22 2.42	.000	20.94 15.74	4.38 3.56	n.s.	22.00 13.75	5.00 4.20	.003
10	I wish to communicate with my classmates	B I A	8.38 20.50 23.00	1.92 3.33 3.67	.000	11.25 18.84	2.25 3.72	.044	10.15 21.45	2.00 3.70	.001
11	I wish to communicate with my Greek friends	B I A	10.79 23.83 18.08	1.92 3.67 2.67	.003	14.62 17.76	3.25 3.60	n.s.	7.69 23.05	1.69 4.15	.000

**Table 2** Learners' instrumental orientation

<sup>1</sup> B: beginners, I: intermediate, A: advanced, <sup>2</sup> K W: Kruskal Wallis, <sup>3</sup> M W U test: Mann Whitney U test, <sup>4</sup> MR: mean rank, <sup>5</sup> M: mean

*Statement 9: I would like to attain a certificate*

Support for this statement can be found in the case of the groups which constitute the first and the third grade. In both instances, beginners allotted a higher mean ranking to this statement than their counterparts. With reference to second graders, no significant differences can be discerned as the members of this grade exhibited similar attitudes towards the pursuit of certificates as they regarded it equally important.

*Statement 10: I would like to communicate with my classmates*

Table 2 presents lower secondary learners' attitudes towards their wish to learn Greek in order to establish successful communication exchanges amongst the classmates. The significant differences that were yielded indicate the differences in students' attitudes across all three grades and within the various groups. To be more specific, in all cases, advanced learners wished to use Greek in their classroom interactions in order to converse with the members of the class who have different mother tongues. Thus, Greek is regarded as the medium of communication to satisfy the need to establish interpersonal relations inside and out-of-class interactions.

*Statement 11: I would like to communicate with my Greek friends*

First and third graders seem to hold quite different views within their groups. Thus, while looking at the former, we can discern that intermediate students once more gave a higher mean ranking than the rest, whereas in the case of the latter, advanced learners displayed a similar attitude. This could lead to an understanding of the students' incentive to use Greek in order to satisfy their communication exchanges with members of the target linguistic group.

#### 4. Discussion and concluding remarks

In order to probe second language learners' attitudes towards Greek as a second language within the intercultural education setting, particular attention was paid to the impact that their proficiency level could have on their attitudes. The previous study by Sougari and Iliopoulou (2011) on uncovering second language learners' motives for learning Greek as a second language failed to report substantial signs of integrative orientation among the members of the three grades, while suggesting that this could be due to their age at the time of arrival in the host country. It seems that older learners resist integration into the speech community in their attempt to retain their self-identity. However, in the present study an examination of the data with respect to the students' proficiency level revealed that favourable attitudes towards the language community are held by those students whose competence in the second language is higher than those who have a lower proficiency level. What could be accounted for is that the make-up of individual classes by certain ethnic groups could very well have to do with how they respond to otherness and the cultural values of the host community. That is why, to a great extent, as regards the intermediate group in Grade 1, they seem to be more positively predisposed to the Greek reality. It



becomes evident that the integrative orientation towards learning the language that students have affects other aspects of their everyday life as well. What is worth mentioning is that quite proficient students show appreciation for the Greek culture, music and film. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that these students also express their positive disposition towards the target speech community of the host country. It appears that the proficiency level plays a key role in determining and instilling positive attitudes and allows students to develop their integrative orientation.

Students of a higher proficiency level pursue communication exchanges in in-class discussions or in their encounters with their Greek friends. It appears that the students of a more advanced proficiency level are more confident to engage in conversations, whereas the rest lack even the necessary self-confidence to interact with their classmates. Consequently, the absence of satisfactory communication with the people in their surroundings does not allow the low proficiency students to practise using the language, to develop relationships and to come into contact with their classmates and other members of the speech community. This vicious circle is counter-productive as the lesser the contact, the lesser the practice and the lesser the appreciation of the host culture and its members. However, what springs from the results in this study is that the students of a low proficiency level show a greater desire to tie up their future with the host country, that is, Greece in this case. In connection to this, they also express that the studying of Greek will serve certain utilitarian purposes; to follow an occupational activity in Greece as well as to sit for a proficiency certificate. Thus, even though low proficiency students do not have a strong integrative orientation, they seem to be instrumentally-oriented.

Once the hurdle of communication is overcome, through various challenging classroom tasks so as to make them favourably predisposed to the pursuit of communication encounters, only then can low proficiency students be integrated into the language community of the host country. Bearing in mind that the findings of the previous study (Sougari and Iliopoulou, 2011) highlighted the students' low motivation level, it becomes pertinent to consider the options available to make students integratively-oriented. Providing intercultural education could be a quite challenging endeavour on its own. Once taking into account the array of opportunities available to the teacher, s/he could alter students' dispositions so as to render them into equal members in the host country.

The results of this study bear implications for the teaching and learning a target language within a second language educational context and what is more within an intercultural education setting. As rightly stated by Triandafyllidou and Gropos (2007: 4), what is needed is to "redefine the objectives, methods and approaches of educational policy" and to host "mother tongue courses and classes on history and culture of country of origin"; these are considered quite important with the framework of intercultural education. It is important to bear in mind that "intercultural education involves not only intercultural exchange and knowledge of other cultures but also a reconsideration of the ingroup culture through the integration of culturally diverse pupils into a cohesive societal whole" (Triandafyllidou and Gropos, 2007: 5). Thus, the role of the teacher in the exploitation of cultural artifacts and the cultivation of positive attitudes should not be underestimated as s/he is the sole mediator of providing filtered information in the classroom setting and the facilitator in his/her attempt to assist his/her students to become autonomous learners and members of the host country. Some practices that the teacher could adopt are the following: (i) adoption of innovative practices, such as differentiated instruction which responds to individual learner needs and the cross-curricular approach, (ii) promotion of project work, which allows students to incorporate elements of their own culture, while working at their own pace, (iii) incorporation of group work in an attempt to instill collaboration and interaction among the members of the class, and (iii) implementation of multi-modal texts, enabling even students with limited or no knowledge of the target language to engage eagerly in activities. The above mentioned suggestions do not entail rejection of the curriculum but rather an adaptation of the curriculum to the needs and interests of the students. What is important is to consider ways in which the diversity of the class could promote an understanding of otherness, a feeling of belonging, an appreciation of diverse cultural artifacts

The implementation of innovative practices is likely to encounter various hurdles, particularly on the part of traditionally-oriented teachers who fail to appreciate the impact of an innovation on learners' attitudes and learning outcomes. Future research should address teachers' response to the intercultural challenge and to the innovations that should be implemented in the intercultural classroom setting. Once teachers recognize the value of incorporating certain practices in their teaching and are properly trained, intercultural education will affect positively the attitudes and lives of second language learners. Impact of their nationality

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