

BILINGUAL SITUATION OF THE GREEK MINORITY IN THE REGION OF GJIROKASTRA

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The Greek ethnic minority living in the district of Gjirokastra develops normally its own language, culture, tradition and schools in both languages. Nowadays, there have been elaborated different educational policies, sometimes not uniform, but in conformity with the objectives of equal development in two languages, in order to avoid situations of conflicts. Actually, there has been a step forward in the school curricula of the 9-th year compulsory educational system, establishing a fair interrelation between two languages in two cycles, particularly concerning the subjects which transmit knowledge and information through Albanian and Greek language. These qualitative changes continuously reflected in the Greek minority education, have been the focus of our study for almost two years, relevant to the following issues: 1. Deep conceptual changes that have covered the learning materials and curricula in the education of the Greek minority learners, by adjusting them to the progressive standards of west countries. 2. Review on study basis of the actual relationships existing between the two cycles of the 9-th year school, concerning the subjects done in the mother tongue and Albanian. We have based this study on experiences, opinions and discussions of teachers and specialists of the Regional Educational Board. 3. Teachers' qualification for the education of the Greek minority in Gjirokastra. 4. Qualification of the Greek minority teachers in Albania and abroad, so as to improve the level of the pedagogical staff in the Greek minority schools. These and other factors, treated in our paper have created an equal status, even of a much more devotion and care for the education in this region. During the process of building the appropriate language policies about the minorities, the Albanian state has been based on the Albanian legislation, which is compiled according to the European and international legislation of these issues.

Keywords: multiculturalism, minority, Greeks in Albania

The centennial coexistence with Albanians, the universal need to human, official and institutional communication, the current geopolitical background and all these factors prepared the conditions for bilingualism at the Greek minority of Albania. This situation implies speaking simultaneously two languages (Albanian and Greek) in the same geographical, economic and

political region, bringing closely two different communities, where you can easily notice the individual status of bilingualism. This phenomenon has not caused conflicts between the two nationalities, but on the contrary it has supported the quality and communicative situation for human and common daily interests between them.

Albanian governments, at different historical periods, according to their political conditions, have drafted the educational policies for the Greek minority. They have not been constant, but never conflicting (Terpo, 2001:8). The Albanian state, despite its political tendencies, has adhered strictly to the issues of Greek minority education. Albanian and Greek are regarded as communicative languages by all Albanian governments, equal in use, officially declared and spread. During the totalitarian regime, where the isolating policy was a heavy burden to all Albanians, causing specific effects to minority population, the Greek language was freely spoken at all environments, within and out of minority space. The use of the mother tongue reflected the protection and development of the local culture and traditions, which on the other hand demonstrates that the inner conflicts were rather moral and pragmatist (Bici, 2001b:24). This relation, established between the Albanian and Greek language during the communist regime, was shocked after '90-ies, after a swift instruction delivered by the Ministry of Education. At this period, because of socio-political, economic and demographic reasons, the level of teaching and using the Albanian language was not satisfactory. According to this instruction, the Albanian language was threatened to being a foreign language. This instruction was greeted by a great number of Greek minorities, having escaped the important fact of being historically citizens of the Republic of Albania. This emotional decision was controlled along the course of history, seeking a return to normality. Aiming to develop and strengthen the identity and the integrating possibilities of the minority group into the socio-political life of the Albanian society, the Albanian state has always guaranteed the educational, spiritual and cultural rights of this population. This is evidently shown in these aspects.

1. The educational policy has regarded the principles and standards foreseen at the "European Charter about regional and minority languages" (1980) approved by European Council as well as other international documents of UN, EU on this domain (Memushaj, 1997:102). These principles have led to compilation of the necessary legislation, where the institutional policies of educating the minority children are based on. Worth mentioning is the law "About the fundamental human rights" approved in April 1993, according to which: "*people belonging to minorities have the right to express, maintain and freely improve their ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic identity, to teach and be taught in their mother tongue...*". This has been fully reflected in the following law "On the Pre-University Educational system", as well as in many other instructions issued by The Council of Ministers and The Ministry of Education (Bici, 2001b:18). Reports about teaching in Albanian language and in their mother tongue are realized on the base of the existing instruction (21.06.1995), *On the Pre-University Educational system* and *The Normative Disposals of Pre-University Education*, September 2002, chapter IV, considering the tradition of dividing the educational levels into primary and secondary grades.

The current policies of the Albanian state towards the Greek Minority education are special and wide-ranging. The institutions and the fundamental means through which this bilingual education is realized are: the school and the teaching process, social and family environment, ethno manifestation activities, where the Greek minority displays its culture, folk, rites and its

religious celebrations. A special attention is paid to education as a qualified process, which implies some important elements being always taken into consideration by the Albanian state. The policy followed at our school and its teaching process has been the primary focus of our study.

2. At this process, school is one of the important factors motivating the child to grasp the teaching experience, to bring him/her up as an individual of a full potential. School is an important cradle, which helps the minority pupil to overcome many complex phenomena. An example of this is the change of codes with the sociological and psychological domains, which has to do with the choice of language the speaker has to follow. Surveying the process of bilingualism among the Greek minority children, the school implements this process gradually, according to teaching years. This child follows his/her first year of primary school with his/her limited vocabulary of the native language. Knowledge about Albanian is almost nothing, with some exception of children who might have learnt something through the contact with the Albanian language. So, the Greek minority children go first footing to school as monolingual. Their contact with Albanian during their first school term is of a negligible effect. During their second term, according to the teaching program, the child comes into contact with the Albanian language through the oral sessions, the aim of which is to lexical field acquisition. The important unit of this period is the word. Their age, their psychophysical and psycho pedagogical features, their teaching through games favor the acquisition of their first, simple, but necessary knowledge. Along their second school year, they are taught Albanian as a foreign language. This subject is a separate subject like the other ones. During the primary school years, the Greek minority child is considered as monolingual. The situation changes all of a sudden, at the secondary level. Albanian language is no longer a foreign language, neither a second language, but more important than the Greek language, which is supposed to be relatively improved. The Albanian language is the means he /she will realize the dreams of education, employment, career and integration. Thus, at his/her end of 9-th grade, the pupil can be proudly considered bilingual. He is still unconscious about it. Following the higher levels, the different subjects favor the code switching. They are consciously motivated to the need of learning Albanian. However, this situation gives these children a special way of structure, word-order, rhythm and stress which are influenced by their mother tongue and accompany them all their life long.

3. Programs and textbooks have recently undergone deep conceptual changes, bringing them closer to other western countries standards. Proportion between the use of native and official language at the teaching process, is determined by special legal acts of The Ministry of Education. Based on decision of The Council of Ministers, nr 19, 1994, the balance of Albanian language/literature with the Greek language/literature was 55 hours to 51.

Following another decision of the Council of Ministers nr.14 in the same year, this balance changes to 42.5 hours /50. According to specialists of education and the daily experience of these schools, this report bears in itself the dynamic of neighboring and global developments, as well as it guarantees a further bilingual education of minority children. This report (generally consolidated) between Albanian and Greek, still continues today at the Greek minority schools, being under the survey of specialists to find out the optimal models to improve both languages. There is an arrangement of teaching subjects: at primary level, all subjects are taught in mother tongue, except for Albanian literature and language. At secondary school, a considerable number of subjects like: math, physics, chemistry, information

technology, Albanian language and literature, Albanian history and geography are all taught in Albanian. The other subjects are taught in their native language. Thus, from the I-IX grade at the Greek minority education it is followed the curricula of the 9-th grade school, but with the following division. In the first grade the child is monolingual and he /she becomes familiar with Albanian at the second school term by an oral course. (This information about programs is taken from two teachers, teaching the Albanian language at the 9 grade school of Greek Minority in Gjirokastra.) Under the influence of this course, the child is taught a limited vocabulary, which includes a certain group of notions; things, phenomena and objects which surround us. Besides, the children start shaping some simple patterns expressing at the same time his/her emotional outlook.

In the second grade teaching Albanian is realized by ABC subject in 24 weeks with 5 lessons in a week. The rest of lessons, which is 45 are realized by different topics in conformity with the ABC. To have a better result, the rest of lessons is outlined as in the following chart.

Table 1

Section	Speaking	Writing	Reading	Linguistic knowledge	Free topics
Lessons/week	10 classes	10 classes	12 classes	13 classes	10: 4 to 6 free classes

In the third grade teaching Albanian is realized in 35 weeks, 5 lessons a week, 175 lessons in all. These lessons are arranged in the following chart:

Table 2

Section	Speaking	Writing	Reading	Linguistic knowledge	Free topics
Lessons/week	15 classes	25 classes	50 classes	70 classes	15: 6 to 9 free classes

In the fourth grade teaching Albanian is realized in 35 weeks, 5 lessons a week, and 175 lessons in all. These lessons are arranged in the following chart:

Table 3

Section	Speaking	Writing	Reading	Linguistic knowledge	Free topics
Lessons/week	26 classes	26 classes	52 classes	45 classes	26: 9 to 17 free classes

In the fifth grade teaching Albanian is realized in 35 weeks, 5 lessons a week, 175 lessons in all. These lessons are arranged in the following chart:

Table 4

Section	Speaking	Writing	Reading	Linguistic knowledge	Free topics
Lessons/week	15 classes	15 classes	65 classes	55 classes	25: 9 to 16 free classes

From the sixth up to ninth grade, the same programs as those of the Albanian schools are followed, but with less lessons, which means 4 classes a week, 140 lessons in all. This incompatibility is trouble for the teachers and should be changed in the future. However, taking into consideration the teachers and other specialists of this domain, we could point out the progress being achieved at the teaching programs of the 9-th grade school, the equal balance between the two languages in its two levels and the subjects where knowledge is gained by using both languages.

4. The educational policy of Albanian state consists also in a continuous care to improve the minority school textbooks besides the national school ones, because the role of teaching texts is a primary concern and materializes the dimensions of a unique content. This is capable of achieving an entire linguistic integration of the minority children (Bici, 2001a:56). These policies have been wide-ranging and the pivot of the educational policy. We will bring up only some characteristics of the language textbooks, because the acquisition of the Albanian and mother language is conditioned by the level of other subjects acquisition, which are taught on a base of a certain balance between Albanian and those in Greek language. At these schools, the language class is the most important one, helping to improve the balanced education of bilingual minority child.

The native language textbooks are completely compiled on the base of new concepts, interweaving functional analysis with the grammatical formal one. The main task of this subject is the active attitude of pupils toward standard language, instilling the basic theoretical knowledge of the standard Greek language into the children, in order to implement it practically.

All the teaching material of textbooks aims to master the orthographic language, the ability to read well with the required intonation, the fundamental mastery of lexicon, word formation, phonetics, morphology, syntax; the use of them in conformity with the stylistic features and concrete communicative situations, orally and written. When compiling the texts, the synchronization of a wide-ranging knowledge within the framework of classes is taken into consideration. Besides, the scientific and practical content of the native language texts shares common features in many aspects, like the similarity they show in grammatical and structural approach.

While compiling the texts of Albanian language, compared with the texts of '90-ies, a special care and devotion is shown by the state institutions. We'll mention only some advantages of these texts without paying a special care to all details on the base of which all primary texts of Albanian language are compiled. We won't bring up any difficulty or shortcoming being faced during the study of these texts and the continuous consultation we had with the respective teachers of these subjects. We think to drop some more lines at another study, because there are some extra linguistic factors which determine the phenomenon complexity of the Greek minority bilingualism in Albania. The texts of Albanian language have paid special attention to functional character of the language, realizing the conformity of dichotomy; language-speech. The most cases are built on the base of analogical textbooks of national school, with a special attention to the bilingual pupil who will thumb through them.

The Albanian language teaching in the minority schools starts in the second semester of the second grade, 2 classes a week. This subject has its own textbook with pictures, portraits and drawings, which enable the learners to acquire a limited vocabulary of new words concerning family, surroundings, school, country, home, games, themselves etc... They are able

to build simple structures, retell in their own words and they can also introduce themselves and greet in Albanian language.

In the second grade, the Albanian language text is made up in two parts. The first part involves ABC teaching, where the learners start to learn, read and write in Albanian language. The second part involves a short course, divided in sections such as: Speaking, Reading, Writing, Linguistic skills etc..., which are developed and elaborated in the coming classes of 9-th grade level. Although, there is a difficult and overloaded curriculum in this grade, there remains a successful attempt on the part of the educational policy to precede the difficulties and obstacles in the coming grades.

The textbooks of other grades, (third, fourth and fifth grade) are compiled on the basis of the above mentioned sections, but also taking into consideration the target of broadening the knowledge and skills, that the minority learner can acquire (In these grades he learns the Albanian language as a second language). The sections: "Speaking" "Reading"," Writing", "Grammar" or the other available classes, from one grade to the other, have their own specifics. In the high level grades the language textbooks are on the way to unification with the mother tongue, especially concerning the grammatical knowledge.

We should emphasize that the bilingual molding of the minority learners is achieved mainly through the texts of Albanian and Greek language, and also through other subjects that are developed in both languages according to a definite school program.

5. Besides the influence of some unique factors that operate in the schools of National Greek Minority, the Albanian state through its educational policies, is giving special consideration to the teacher's qualification and the role they have to play, as an important potential in the progress of learners' bilingual molding in these schools. The role of teachers is many-sided, because the teacher is the main key of the school activities. In addition, under the present circumstances, the crucial factor that helps learners to learn the Albanian language is the teacher and his work (Dhima, 2001:68).

Their success and suitability in these schools has been perfectly combined with the linguistic and scientific knowledge, with other psychological, social and pedagogical factors.

- a. They acquire fairly well the language and culture of the two ethnics, the official and motherland state, in spite of their profile.
- b. They possess the appropriate psycho pedagogical, methodological, didactic preparation and the ability to adjust with the bilingual environment.
- c. They acknowledge the linguistic difficulties of the learner and give their contribution in overcoming these difficulties.

The state structures show special care towards the perfection of the didactic methods by these teachers, in order to achieve a progress with the teaching process. Perfection is aimed at the methods that enhance the level of communication, participation in the lesson through conversations, competitions, dialogues and work in groups etc.

There are made continuous attempts to achieve the communicative skill and the appropriate ability to absorb the information in Albanian language by contributing with the creation of a linguistic foundation of definite requirements, organizing various activities in Albanian and Greek language. All the school teachers are involved in this process besides their profile.

Special attention is dedicated to the teacher's qualification which consists of two aspects: the linguistic and methodological. The linguistic aspect is characterized by efficiency, especially in the acquisition of different sciences

terminology in Greek language. The aspect of teacher's qualification is treated by the Regional Educational Board, the Department of Greek language, Department of Albanian language at "Eqrem Çabej" University; also a special contribution is given by the University of Janina, Greece.

If we see the educational policies undertaken by the Albanian state on a wider context and viewpoint, we can state that the protection of minority languages, the devotion and their perfection are being treated in relation to the application of some of the essential principles of human rights, established and sanctioned by the international organizations.

Different means of expressions have served to transmit to people the awareness for an equal dignity with all forms of linguistic expression and have avoided the traditional contradictory attitudes towards those who use this language.

Therefore, everyone should understand that the minority child mother tongue is not the only one among the possible forms of expression and it is not better or worse than others, i.e. this grows the air of tolerance and understanding between the populations. This has been achieved successfully by the Albanian state, a good example for the Balkan and other countries.

Both nationalities in the Republic of Albania have gained awareness about their fate within the boundaries of a common state and are making their maximal efforts to considerably strengthen these institutions, where bilingualism is noticed sometimes as a means, and sometimes as a purpose. This is always in the function of the universal needs for communication and coexistence. Within this context, strengthening and modernization of education and school in the national Greek minority, remains primary and definite, moreover an obligation of the Albanian state and minority people themselves.

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