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Language choice among Albanian immigrant adolescents in Greece: The effect of the interlocutor’s generation

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**Abstract**

Research in bilingualism developed in immigrant contexts (Clyne, 1991; Clyne & Kipp, 1997; Li Wei, 1994; Pauwels, 2004, etc.) has demonstrated that the use of the ethnic language usually diminishes as a function of the generation the speaker and his/her interlocutor belongs to: while parents use the second language to a smaller or larger extent, their children soon develop a preference for the majority language and use it especially with same-age interlocutors.

This paper reports findings related to a questionnaire study conducted in Crete in 2009 (Xenikaki, 2010) with the aim to investigate patterns of Greek and ethnic language use among the immigrant-origin secondary-school students of Ierapetra. In particular we discuss the Albanian students’ (N=79) patterns of language use with family and friends and the potential influence of the interlocutors’ generation on language choice. Our findings suggest that our subjects still use frequently the ethnic language with family members but its use diminishes along age lines, something which concurs with previous research. The tendency to use the majority language with siblings and peers is also clear. However, for the time being the ethnic language can be said to hold its ground in this particular community.

**Keywords:** immigrant adolescents, Albanian-Greek bilinguals, language choice, language maintenance

**Language choice in the context of immigration**

Bilingual settings emerging from immigration are usually characterized by a functional differentiation between the majority and the minority languages. Such a differentiation often takes the form of a change in the functional distribution of L1 and L2 at the cost of the former (Extra & Verhoeven, 1993; Pauwels, 2004) and results in *language shift*, defined as “the gradual disappearance of a language in a community where it used to be spoken” (Jaspaert & Kroon, 1993: 298). In other cases, though, the immigrant community in question manages to achieve *language maintenance*, since it continues to use the minority language alongside the majority one in some or all spheres of life (Pauwels, 2004: 719).

A useful theoretical tool for analysing minority speakers’ behaviour with regard to language maintenance and shift has proven to be the concept of domains, introduced by Joshua Fishman (1965/2007). Domains can be thought of as interactional situations such as family, friendship, religion, education and employment, where the use of a specific language is deemed appropriate. Research in language maintenance and shift has frequently made use of domain analysis (cf. e.g. Janik, 1996; Namei, 2008; Urzua & Gomez, 2008), investigating the gradual take-over of informal domains (such as family, friendship, leisure), which supposedly call for the use of the minority language, by the language of the majority. Its application has demonstrated the unequivocal importance of certain domains such as the family and friendship networks for language maintenance.
Aspasia Chatzidaki - Ioanna Xenikaki: Language choice among Albanian immigrant adolescents in Greece: The effect of the interlocutor’s generation

(Garcia, 2003; Winter & Pauwels, 2006; Yağmur & Akinci, 2003). After all, as Fishman (1991) argues, intergenerational language transmission is the condition sine qua non of language maintenance. Without a secure place for the ethnic language in the family repertoire, mother tongue education on its own cannot ensure its survival.

It is, therefore, imperative that any investigation of a minority community’s behaviour in a particular setting include the analysis of its members’ linguistic behaviour in those domains. Research so far has produced two basic findings. First, the majority language constitutes the children’s main or preferred code with siblings and peers, being the language of their primary or secondary socialization (e.g. Oliver & Purdie, 1998; Tannenbaum, 2003; Wong-Fillmore, 1991). Because of its heightened saliency for their lives, children eventually impose the majority language as a legitimate code in the family repertoire, irrespective of their parents’ wishes; the only thing that seems to differ is the degree of use of the majority language and the rate of its ‘intrusion’. Spolsky (2004:45) characteristically refers to this phenomenon as children acting as agents of change, since the intrusion of the majority language into the family domain paves the way for language shift. A second finding refers to the dynamics developed within the family environment and which refer to age, or to be exact, to speakers’ generation (Clyne, 1991; Clyne & Kipp, 1997; Li Wei, 1994; Pauwels, 2004, 2005; Tannenbaum, 2003; Wright & Kurtoglu-Hooton, 2006; Yağmur & Akinci, 2003). There usually seems to be a decline of the use of the ethnic language along age lines: grandparents use it the most, parents to a fair extent, children much less. Other relatives and friends (uncles/aunts, cousins, friends of the family, friends of the children) tend to behave according to the generation group they belong to. Moreover, interlocutors accommodate to a large extent to the preference attributed to each speaker on the basis of his/her generation. For instance, children speak the ethnic language far more to their grandparents than to their siblings, and the same applies to parents. On the whole, the degree to which the ethnic language continues to be used at home depends upon the extent to which younger speakers respect their elders’ linguistic preference and accommodate to them.

The present paper reports on a study of Albanian immigrant adolescents in Greece which investigated, among other things, patterns of language use in the ‘home’ and ‘friendship’ domains and whether there were correlations between language choice and the interlocutors’ age group/generation. Our purpose was to contribute to the discussion regarding such issues by shedding additional light on a previously rather under-researched group. Moreover, our study complements, from the point of view of geography and methodology, the few studies investigating issues of language shift among Albanians in Greece (Chatzidaki, 2005; Gogonas, 2007; Maligkoudi, 2010). We shall discuss the specific place it holds among them in the last section of the paper.

Albanian immigrants in Greece

In the last twenty years, Greece has been receiving a large number of illegal aliens from a multitude of countries, ranging from the Balkans to Asia and Africa. Albanian immigrants constitute the largest ethnic group among foreign workers in Greece; they number over 400,000 people and account for 57.5% of the registered immigrant population (Lyberaki & Maroukis, 2005). Albanian-origin children are the majority of immigrant-background students. According to official figures, in 2002-03 students born in Albania accounted for 69,880 children constituting 72.4% of foreign-born students in the Greek educational system (grades K to 12) (Gotovos & Markou, 2004). These figures do not include an important number of children currently in Greek Kindergartens and primary schools who
were born in Greece to Albanian parents.

Albanian immigration into Greece started in the early ‘90s, immediately after the collapse of the communist regime in Albania (Gogonas, 2007; Maligkoudi, 2010). Although in the ‘90s Albanians used to perform only badly paid, low-prestige, unstable jobs and to have no social security, more recent studies (Hatziprokopiou, 2003; Gogonas, 2007, 2010; Lyberaki & Maroukis, 2005) suggest that many Albanian immigrants have managed to secure an upward economic mobility and have organized their lives in increasingly better terms as far as employment, residence, social security and interpersonal relations are concerned. In fact, many studies testify to their willingness to integrate into the host society, especially with regard to the second generation (Pavlou et al., 2005 in Gogonas, 2007, 2010).

Despite their eagerness to transcend ethnic borders, their acceptance by the majority population remains problematic. As Gogonas (2007, 2009, 2010) points out, the Greek people, who pride themselves in their homogeneity and their distinct ethnic and religious identity vis-à-vis other European nations, were not prepared for the immigration wave which ensued in the last twenty years and the settlement of such large numbers of people of different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, immigrants, especially Albanians, have been portrayed by most media as villains and criminals; the unprecedented rise in crime figures has been attributed to the presence of immigrants, contributing thus to their collective demonization (Hatziprokopiou, 2003; Gogonas, 2009, 2010).

With regard to the measures aiming at addressing cultural and linguistic diversity at the school level, one might say they have been too vague and off-focus. Educational provisions for immigrant children include mainly the teaching of Greek as a Second language in Reception or Tutorial classes in mainstream schools (Dimakos & Tasiopoulou, 2003). The legislation currently in place (law 2413/96 on Intercultural Education) has not ensured the kind of policies that would permeate the whole educational system, enhancing students’ awareness of and acceptance of cultural diversity among them (Damanakis, 1997; Mitakidou, Tressou & Danililiou, 2007). The Greek educational system has been criticized for promoting ethnocentrism and conformity with monolingual norms (Frangoudaki & Dragonas, 1997). In mainstream schools, the pupils’ cultural and religious diversity are not taken into consideration with the exception of the child’s exemption from the Religious education class and the attendance of religious services should the parents request it. There is no provision for heritage language instruction at school at present, although the law stipulates this possibility. On the whole, minority children’s bilingualism remains largely “invisible” (Tsokalidou, 2005) and absent from the school premises. Misguided teachers advise parents to speak only Greek at home or, at best, consider their first language as an obstacle to be overcome rather than as an asset to be cherished and cultivated, and do nothing to promote its development and use at school (Gkaintartzi & Tsokalidou, 2011; Gogonas, 2007; Kassimi, 2005). As a result, the burden of developing bilingualism in the ethnic languages falls upon the families themselves.

The study

Background of the study

Although this paper discusses findings related to Albanian-origin adolescents, it should be said that they formed part of the sample of a larger investigation, which was undertaken for the requirements of a Master’s thesis (Xenikaki, 2010). The study took the form of a questionnaire survey and was conducted in February and March 2009. The overall aim of
the research was to investigate patterns of bilingual development and language choice in a group of immigrant-background adolescents living in the Greek countryside. The research site was the town of Ierapetra, located on the south-east coast of Crete, which has been attracting quite a large number of immigrants employed mainly as farm workers. The county of Lasithi, to which Ierapetra belongs, is among those which contain the highest percentages of immigrant workers (Rovolis & Tragaki, 2006). As a result, the situation there was considered rather typical of Greece at large.

Sample

The original population under study consisted of the total number of students of immigrant origin in the three Secondary schools of Ierapetra (n=118). The Albanian group (n=79) made up 67% of the original sample. The final sample, discussed in this paper, amounted to 79 youngsters, 43 boys and 36 girls, aged between 11 and 17 years (mean age of 14).

Only five of our informants were born in Greece (6.3%). The rest had a mean age of arrival of 3.71 years. A more accurate picture is given if one considers that 79.9% of the informants who were born in Albania came to Greece when they were between a few months old and six years old (63.3% were under four years old when they arrived). Their length of stay was calculated on the basis of information concerning their age of arrival and their present age. It varies between one (for one student) and thirteen years with a mean of more than ten years (10.11).

With regard to their integration into native peer groups, the vast majority of the students (89.9%) were involved in multicultural, multilingual friendship relationships, as they claimed to have friends from Greece, their parents’ country of origin and other countries.

As far as education in the country of origin is concerned, only 21.5% (n=17) had attended some classes there, with the majority (9 children) having attended only as far as second grade.

Finally, information was sought and collected on our subjects’ language competence. The instrument used was a self-rating scale. Informants were asked to provide an assessment of their own competence in both languages on a five-point scale (“not at all”, “a little”, “so and so”, “fairly well”, “very well”) and in five different skills (“I can speak”, “I can understand a conversation between strangers or watch a TV series”, “I can understand my teachers during courses/a news bulletin on TV”, “I can read”, “I can write”) covering both informal and formal (‘academic’) aspects of language competence (Cummins, 2000).

With regard to the Greek language, our informants report a high level of competence, fairly evenly distributed across skills (combined ratings of “fairly well” and “very well” range between 91.1% for writing to 98.7% for understanding teachers/TV programmes and speaking skills). Such a finding is largely to be expected given their considerable length of stay and the fact that they received most or all of their schooling in Greek. As it might be expected, the same skills are less developed in the ethnic language: 81% can understand a conversation between strangers or a TV series “fairly” or “very well”, 69.6% report the same ability with regard to understanding a news Bulletin on TV, 78.5% with regard to speaking, 57% with regard to reading and 44.3% with regard to writing. All in all, the discrepancies noted are not extraordinary, as in the course of time the lack of opportunities to develop the ethnic language lead to diminished competence. However, in our view, the fact that about 4/5 of the sample have reported speaking and understanding the ethnic language “fairly” or “very well” should be considered as evidence of a satisfactory level of development. It is also noteworthy that, whereas only 21.5% of the informants have had
some schooling in their country of origin, the percentage of those who claim to be able to read and write in Albanian ‘‘fairly’’ or ‘‘very well’’ is much higher, suggesting that parents managed to ensure that their offspring develop literacy skills in their language. In sum, the bilingualism our informants seem to experience is quite robust, something which obviously influences their language choices.

**Data collection instruments**

Our data collection instrument was a questionnaire in Greek comprising three sections. The first section contained questions regarding the students’ background: place of birth, age of arrival, number of school grades attended in country of origin, parents’ nationality and country of origin, etc. Questions in the second section regarded the students’ linguistic competence in Greek and their other language (Albanian in this case), and frequency of language use in specific activities. Finally, students were asked to provide data on their language choice with various interlocutors (family members and friends, all potential speakers of the ethnic language who live in Greece) and on the latter’s language choice with them. The question format we opted for was a variation of ‘language background scales’, used in many similar studies (cf. e.g. Extra & Yağmur, 2009; Janik, 1996; Namei, 2008; Urzua & Gomez, 2008; Wright & Kurtoğlu, 2006). Informants were asked to choose one of the following options: (I speak to X/X speaks to me) (1) ‘‘only in the ethnic language’’, (2) ‘‘mostly in the ethnic language’’, (3) ‘‘in both languages equally’’, (4) ‘‘mostly in Greek’’, and (5) ‘‘only in Greek’’. The inclusion of relatives, friends of the family and children’s friends corresponds roughly to the ‘home’ and ‘friendship’ domains and is structured along the generation line (older vs same age interlocutors).

**Procedure**

The researcher – the second author - visited the three schools after having obtained the permission of the authorities concerned (Pedagogical Institute) and the collaboration of the headmasters. At first, she presented herself to the students as a teacher of Greek and postgraduate student who was to give them a lecture on the topic of multilingualism. The ‘lecture’ was basically a series of quizzes on language variety around the globe and on the foreign loanwords in the Greek language. Our aim was twofold: firstly, to pave the ground for the researcher’s second visit in which the actual data collection took place, showing that the researcher holds positive views towards bilingualism and diversity. Secondly, we wished to avoid targeting the immigrant students as our informants, since we thought this might bring unwanted attention to their ‘distinct’ identity and create or enhance feelings of marginalization. As a result, when the researcher visited the school for the second time, the headmaster invited all immigrant and some Greek students in each class (all of them supposedly chosen at random) to take part in her study, completing the questionnaires in a quiet room in the presence of the researcher. The Greek students were given slightly different questionnaires to complete, containing questions about their knowledge of other languages (English, French etc.) and their linguistic practices. These data were not included in our study.

**Limitations of the study**

Obviously, the fact that our findings are based on self-reports and not corroborated by participant observation or other triangulation techniques is the main limitation of the study. With regard to the issue of self-assessment for instance (which is not a major variable in this paper, however), we are aware that although self-rating is a very common technique in
language maintenance research, it presents a number of shortcomings. Some of them are the high degree of subjectivity involved, the lack of a common conceptual base against which subjects can measure their own proficiency, their wish to please the researcher e.t.c. (Baker, 2006: 26-27, Edwards 2006:9). This is why it should optimally be complemented with other instruments and techniques in order to gain more in-depth information. However, due to time considerations, we decided to select data in the most economical way possible. Obviously, our findings should be treated with the appropriate degree of caution.

One could also point out (cf. e.g. Baker 2006: 32-33) that the use of ‘language background scales’ leaves many questions related to patterns of language choice unanswered. It could also be argued –from a different point of view- that referring to the codes in a bilingual’s repertoire as stable and discrete systems (‘ethnic language’, ‘Greek’) fails to do justice to the complexity of bilingual speech. Such criticisms are valid, indeed. Probing the subjects’ language use patterns in such a way takes out of the picture issues such as the emergence of ‘mixed’ varieties or the use of code-switching, which is typical in such contexts (Gardner-Chloros 2009; Myers-Scotton, 2006, Sella-Mazi, 2001). However, such issues are admittedly more appropriately investigated through ethnographic, qualitative research; surveys conducted through questionnaires are not a sufficiently flexible tool, especially when the researcher wishes to correlate speech phenomena with demographic factors (cf. e.g. Schader, 2006). This is why we consider surveys a useful first step into a community’s behavior which needs to be combined with more qualitative research (Pauwels, 2004).

**Discussion of findings**

As mentioned earlier, our informants were asked to choose one of the following options: (I speak to X/X speaks to me) (1) ‘only in the ethnic language’, (2) ‘mostly in the ethnic language’, (3) ‘in both languages equally’, (4) ‘mostly in Greek’, and (5) ‘only in Greek’. Their answers were originally codified as percentages included in five-column tables. To allow for a more concise presentation, in this paper we have decided to join percentages for options (1) and (2) on the one hand, and options (4) and (5) on the other.

The first results (Tables 1a and 1b) concern the informants’ language choice with older and younger interlocutors respectively.

**Table 1a. Languages informants use with parents, grandparents, uncles/aunts and friends of the family (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant speaks to</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>only or mostly in Albanian</th>
<th>in both languages equally</th>
<th>only or mostly in Greek</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>father</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mother</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uncles/aunts</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grandparents</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>78.2</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family friends</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to the language choices reported for parents, uncles and parents’ friends, we observe that almost half the sample reports using mostly or exclusively the Albanian language with them (49.6%, 48.1%, 47.3%, 51.9%). On the other hand, the percentage of
those who report the predominant or sole use of the Greek language ranges between 21.6 and 30.4. Moreover, the use of the ethnic language increases when the addressee is a grandparent (78.2%). Apparently, grandparents are the kind of interlocutor that ‘compels’ younger speakers to use the ethnic language with them, a common finding in the literature (Clyne, 1991; Janik, 1996; Luo & Wiseman, 2000; Pauwels, 2005; Wright & Kurtoğlu-Hooton, 2006) that points to the importance of older family members for language maintenance.

The picture that emerges from our informants’ language choice with younger speakers is quite different, as Table 1b shows.

Table 1b. Languages informants use with siblings, cousins and peers (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant speaks to</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>only or mostly in Albanian</th>
<th>in both languages equally</th>
<th>only or mostly in Greek</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>younger siblings</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>older siblings</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>78.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cousins</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>65.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friends at school</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>68.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friends out of school</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>64.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of our informants (58.8% to 78.1%) use exclusively or predominantly Greek when they address same-age relatives and friends. Especially impressive is the low use of Albanian towards older siblings (7.3%), compared to the use of the ethnic language with younger siblings (21.6%). We shall return to this point later on.

With regard to language use with friends at school, the Albanian language is reportedly used by one third of our sample (32%). This finding suggests that, although the Greek educational system does not encourage or promote the use of other languages, they are nevertheless present at the school premises. As other researchers have suggested (Extra & Yağmur, 2009; Willoughby, 2009), immigrant languages in this context usually serve ‘social’ functions such as marking solidarity with the ethnic group or putting forward a distinct identity.

The second part of our presentation of findings involves language choice towards the subjects (Tables 2a and 2b).

Table 2a: Languages older-generation interlocutors use with informants (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant is spoken to by</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>only or mostly in Albanian</th>
<th>in both languages equally</th>
<th>only or mostly in Greek</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>father</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mother</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uncles/ aunts</td>
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<td>52.7</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grandparents</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family friends</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The language which predominates in the older speakers’ choices is the ethnic one, with grandparents leading (69.5% use mostly or only Albanian), followed by fathers (61.5%). Lower percentages of predominant Albanian use are recorded in the case of mothers, uncles/aunts and friends of the family.

On the contrary, younger-generation speakers show a distinct preference for Greek, which is chosen as the main or the sole code of communication towards the subjects by almost two thirds of the sample. Younger siblings are an exception here, as they speak “only or mostly Greek” to a much smaller degree than other categories of speakers (51%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant is spoken to by</th>
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<tr>
<td>friends out of school</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>65.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to investigate the degree of reciprocity in language choice (see results in Tables 1a and 1b compared to results in Tables 2a and 2b respectively), we applied Wilcoxon’s test. Statistically significant correlations (p<.05) were found only in the following three cases, namely with regard to the language choice between:

(a) the informants and their fathers (p=.000)

(b) the informants and their mothers (p=.001) and

(c) the informants and their older siblings (p=.041).

In all three cases, informants use the ethnic language towards these interlocutors to a smaller extent than the latter use with them.

Finally, in order to ascertain whether the students’ language behaviour varies according to their interlocutors - our main research question- we applied Wilcoxon's test one more time. The multiple comparisons showed that there were indeed statistically significant differences linked basically to the interlocutor’s generation. First of all, there were no statistically significant differences between the language choice reported for interlocutors who belong to the same (older, young) generation (p>.05), with the exception of grandparents, who differ in the language they are spoken to from all other interlocutors. On the contrary, there were statistically significant differences between the informants’ language choice with all members of the older generation and the members of the younger one (p<.05).

With regard to language choices made by interlocutors towards the informants, there were again differences found between generations of speakers (p=.000). These results suggest a neat distinction of language preferences according to age group or generation of speakers; the younger one is, the more one uses the Greek language and vice versa.
Discussion and conclusions

The study in question aimed at exploring the degree of ethnic language use in the ‘home’ and in the ‘friendship’ domains in a sample of 79 youngsters of Albanian origin who live in a small provincial town in Crete. Our investigation was based on an analysis of their language choice patterns both by and towards them when their interlocutor was a family member or someone belonging to their own or their parents’ friendship network (‘friend of the family’). The basic premise of our research was that the use of the ethnic language would characterize mainly older interlocutors (both as speakers and as addressees), and, as a result, that it would diminish along generation lines. However, the first step was to ascertain the frequency of ethnic/majority language use in this particular sample.

According to our subjects’ own reports, they frequently speak Albanian with older family members (nearly half the sample report using mostly or exclusively the Albanian language with parents, uncles and parents’ friends, and nearly four quarters do the same with grandparents). They are also frequently addressed in this language by these speakers (nearly 70% of grandparents and more than 60% of fathers use mostly or exclusively Albanian with the children, the rest of the older interlocutors following suit). Moreover, the ethnic language is still in use among younger speakers, especially siblings, despite the fact that about two thirds of the sample report using ‘mostly or only’ the Greek language (percentages vary between 58% and 78%). A first conclusion, therefore, is that our subjects seem to uphold the use of Albanian among family members and friends (mostly in the former case). This, in our view, suggests that the ethnic language is quite ‘safe’ for the time being in this particular community. This contention is further supported by the fact that many of our subjects have developed satisfactory levels of literacy and overall competence in this language, despite the fact that they had not had the chance to attend school in the country of origin. Since mother-tongue courses are lacking, one has to attribute our subjects’ bilingual development to a supportive home environment which implemented language policies promoting bilingualism and biliteracy. This obviously included the sustained use of the ethnic language both by parents, grandparents -when present-, and older siblings, in some cases.

With regard to the latter, as Tables 1b and 2b indicate, our subjects claim to use Albanian much more often with their younger (21.6% and 23.5%) than with their older siblings (7.3% and 12.2%). Investigating the degree of reciprocity between the informants’ and other interlocutors’ language choice with them, we found (again using Wilcoxon’s test) that fathers, mothers and older siblings were the types of interlocutors who used significantly more Albanian with the informants than the latter used with them (p= .000, p= .001 and p= .041 respectively). A possible interpretation of why older siblings tend to behave more like parents than like younger siblings and other same-age speakers may lie in the family’s ‘obligation’ to transmit the ethnic language to the next generation. Older siblings may share this duty as well, especially since usually both parents work, sometimes long hours, and child-rearing becomes a responsibility which falls upon the shoulders of an older child. It may also be the case that older siblings taught younger ones to read and write, as they were more advanced in such skills when they arrived in the host country. In general, older siblings have been reported to retain the use of the minority language more than younger ones in various contexts (e.g. Obied, 2009; Shin, 2002).

On the other hand, it is interesting that there were no differences found between the language informants choose when they address their grandparents and the language the latter use with them. It seems that in their case, young people are in a way ‘forced’ to use the ethnic language to a high degree, either because of their grandparents’ limited
competence in Greek or because they are stricter concerning language use (cf. Janik, 1996; Luo & Wiseman, 2000; Pauwels, 2005; Wright & Kurtoglu-Hooton, 2006). Other members of the older generation seem more tolerant towards the use of the majority language at home, so children can act more like language brokers (Myers-Scotton, 2006:101) in their case.

With regard to our main question as to whether there are patterns of language choice based on the interlocutors’ generation, our findings seem quite straightforward. The application of Wilcoxon’s test showed that, on the one hand, there were no statistically significant differences between the language choice reported for interlocutors who belong to the same (older, young) generation (p>.05), while there were statistically significant differences between the subjects’ language choice with all members of the older generation and the members of the younger one (p<.05).

Our findings are in line with research in other immigrant communities around the globe which points to the important role the speaker’s generation plays in issues of language choice with family and friends. While it confirms the basic trends, it sets an interesting question regarding the role of older vs younger siblings; in most studies there is no differentiation between interaction with an older or a younger sibling. Our findings suggest that this issue requires further investigation.

As mentioned earlier, our study complements from a methodological perspective the few other sociolinguistic studies which were conducted in Greece on language shift among Albanian immigrants. Although Chatzidaki (2005) used questionnaires and Maligkoudi (2010) used interviews to investigate language maintenance in Albanian households, they both resorted to parental reports with regard to their children’s language competence and bilingual use patterns. On the contrary, in our study, teenage speakers had the chance to express themselves on such issues. Gogonas, on the other hand, did use 70 adolescent informants of Albanian background in his study on language shift among the Albanian community in Athens (Gogonas 2007, 2009). Working within the framework of ethnolinguistic vitality theory, he collected information on language competence and use in his subjects’ families using mainly questionnaires. Although the questions relating to language choice -and his results- are very similar to ours, his study does not discuss in similar length the question of the role of various interlocutors with regard to language choice (no Wilcoxon-test was performed, for instance, to establish statistically significant differences). Based on the above, we consider that our study adds important new information on the language patterns of young bilingual speakers of Albanian speakers in Greece while investigating thoroughly the effect of the speakers’ generation.

However, all the above-mentioned studies, including our own, point to the same picture; although Albanian is still used quite frequently by young speakers, especially when they address older family members, second-generation speakers demonstrate a distinct preference for the use of the majority language. Although such findings are usually interpreted as indications of imminent language shift, we suggest that caution -and further research- is needed in the case of the Albanian community. One needs to take into account the fact that Albanian immigration is quite recent, that for many families it was meant to be temporary, and that the financial crisis has delivered a hard blow to the economic sectors providing employment to immigrants. On the other hand, the new legislation and ‘regularization’ programmes allow immigrants to apply for the status of the ‘long-term resident’ or even for the Greek nationality (Gogonas, 2010), making it thus easier for families to envisage a new life in Greece. Factors such as these have a direct bearing on the immigrants’ transmission of their languages, as well as the speakers’ ideologies towards the
languages and the societies in question. Therefore, we propose that future research should combine survey-like studies with qualitative, ethnographic research which is more suited to unveil the intricacies involved in speakers’ relationship with their language and their identity.

References


Aspasia Chatzidaki - Ioanna Xenikaki: Language choice among Albanian immigrant adolescents in Greece: The effect of the interlocutor’s generation


**Brief biographies**

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Aspasia Chatzidaki (MA, University of Reading, Ph.D., Vrije Universiteit Brussel) is an Assistant Professor of Bilingualism at the Department of Primary Education of the University of Crete. Her research interests and publications refer to sociolinguistic aspects of bilingualism and the teaching of Greek as a second language both in Greece and abroad.

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Ioanna Xenikaki is a teacher of Greek in secondary education. She holds a Master’s degree from the Department of Primary Education of the University of Crete (dissertation title ‘*Bilingual development and bilingual use of immigrant high school students in Ierapetra, Crete*’ [in Greek]). She has presented papers in various conferences.