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## TEACHING GREEK AS A HERITAGE LANGUAGE IN THE USA

This invited presentation reports on the development of a new needs-based curriculum for teaching Greek as a Heritage Language (HL) to Greek heritage language learners (GHLL) in the USA. The new curriculum is aligned with the ACTFL World Readiness Standards but, at the same time, it introduces several innovations to address the challenges in HL learning pedagogy as to: (a) the GHLLs' skills and competencies (communicative and academic), (b) their plurilingual, dialectal, and pluricultural awareness, (c) the needs-oriented macro- and micro-approaches applied in HL teaching, and (d) the detailed syllabi descriptors from Pre-Kindergarten to K8 (Intermediate Mid to High). This research offers insights into how GHLLs' characteristics can be aligned with their educational needs.

**Keywords:** Heritage Greek, heritage speaker, curriculum, teaching heritage languages

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of heritage language (HL) education is widely recognized today. Initiatives such as those led by the National Heritage Language Resource Center at UCLA have proven to be highly influential in advancing the field within the USA. Despite the significant number of Greek Heritage Speakers (GHSs) in the United States, this group remained largely unexplored until recently. The creation of the Greek Heritage Language Corpus (GHLC) (Gavriilidou et al. 2019) and the socio-linguistic profiling of GHSs (Gavriilidou & Mitits 2019, 2021) within the framework of the project "Varieties of Greek as a Heritage Language: Creation of a Corpus and Comparative Study" (MIS 5006199, Scientific Coordinator: Professor Zoe Gavriilidou) has provided valuable insights into the characteristics and educational needs of this under-researched group. Complementing this, a survey investigating the perspectives, attitudes, and needs of teachers instructing Greek

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in U.S. schools served as the foundation for developing a needs-based curriculum for teaching Greek as a Heritage Language. The curriculum development process for teaching Greek as a HL was guided by the goal of addressing GHSs' specific needs to enhance their learning experience and strengthen their proficiency in Greek.

Building on this foundation, the purpose of this keynote speech is to underscore the importance of creating a new community-driven, needs-based curriculum for teaching Greek to heritage language learners in the United States. It will detail the stages of the curriculum's development and highlight its unique features and innovative aspects. The paper starts with a brief literature review on Heritage Languages and their speakers followed by a review of the characteristics of Greek Heritage speakers and their current education in the USA before offering a thorough presentation of the building stages, characteristics and novelties of the new *Curriculum for Teaching Greek as a Heritage Language: A Framework for Teachers* (Gavriilidou & Mitsiaki 2022; Gavriilidou et al. 2023).

This research offers insights into how GHLS' characteristics can be aligned with their educational needs when designing curricula and educational material.

## 2. HERITAGE LANGUAGES AND THEIR SPEAKERS

Heritage language is a "language spoken in immigrants' families, which was first in the order of acquisition but was not completely acquired because of the individual's switch to another dominant language" (Polinsky & Kagan 2007: 369). On the other hand, heritage language speakers are the children of immigrants born in the host country or immigrant children who arrived in the host country some time in childhood and "they are simultaneous or sequential (successive) bilinguals whose weaker language corresponds to the minority language of their society and whose stronger language is the dominant language of that society" (Polinsky 2018: 33). HLSs are considered to be a particular type of speakers who differ from monolingual native language speakers whose L1 is stronger, dominant or the primary language which is supported by the environment; thus, HLSs diverge from them in phonology, lexical knowledge, morphology, syntax, case marking, and code-switching. They also differ from foreign language/L2 learners in the timing of input, the setting of learning and the modality (Montrul 2012). For FL/L2 learners the weaker language is always the L2 but for heritage speakers it is the L1. This happens because there is a shift from the HL to the official host country functional linguistic dominance. This leads to HL attrition in areas like phonetics/phonology, morphology, syntax (Au et al. 2002; Keating et al. 2011; Laleko 2010; Montrul & Bowles 2009; Polinsky 2008; Rothman 2007), vocabulary (Montrul & Foote 2014), semantics and pragmatics (Montrul & Ionin 2012).

## **2.1. Greek Heritage Language Speakers in USA and around the world**

Considering the definitions for HSs presented above, we discuss in this section who are considered Greek HSs. Since 1820 the USA has been one of the principal destinations of Greek immigrants (Abbot 1909; Kopan 1989). Migratory flows reached a peak during 1900-1910 and 1911-1920. The 1990 Census reported the number of people claiming at least one ancestry as Greek at 1.110.373, while 321.144 people older than five spoke Greek at home. Most of the immigrants were from Laconia, notably, from the city of Sparta (a province of the Peloponnesus in southern Greece). From the 1890s, Greeks began arriving from other parts of Greece, principally from Arcadia, another province in the Peloponnesus. Although the majority of the Greek immigrants were villagers, very few of them settled in agriculture areas (Seeman 2017). They mainly settled in major urban areas, including the industrial cities of the Northeast and Midwest (Salutos 1964, Kopan 1989).

One of the highest concentrations of Greek heritage speakers is in the Chicago metropolitan area. The Chicago's Greek Town is the oldest, largest and more lively Greek settlement in the USA (Kopan 1989). Actually, by 1990 the U.S. census counted more than 70.000 people in metropolitan Chicago claiming Greek ancestry, approximately one-third in the city and two-thirds in the suburbs. The 2000 census counted 93.140 people of Greek ancestry in the metropolitan region. Community estimates, however, ranged from 90.000 to 125.000 (<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/548.html>).

However, the exact number of Greeks living outside Greece and Cyprus is uncertain. According to Seeman (2017: 22) "the failure of the Greek government to keep accurate records and the difficulties on both sides of the Atlantic of defining a 'Greek' account for most of the confusion". Available census figures indicate about three million Greeks outside Greece and Cyprus, the General Secretariat for Greeks Abroad today, estimates that more than 5 million citizens of Greek origin live outside the Greek borders scattered in 140 countries, while the World Council for Hellenes abroad estimates about seven million worldwide. Table 1 provides data from the General Secretariat of Greeks abroad that indicate recent immigration due to the economic crisis.

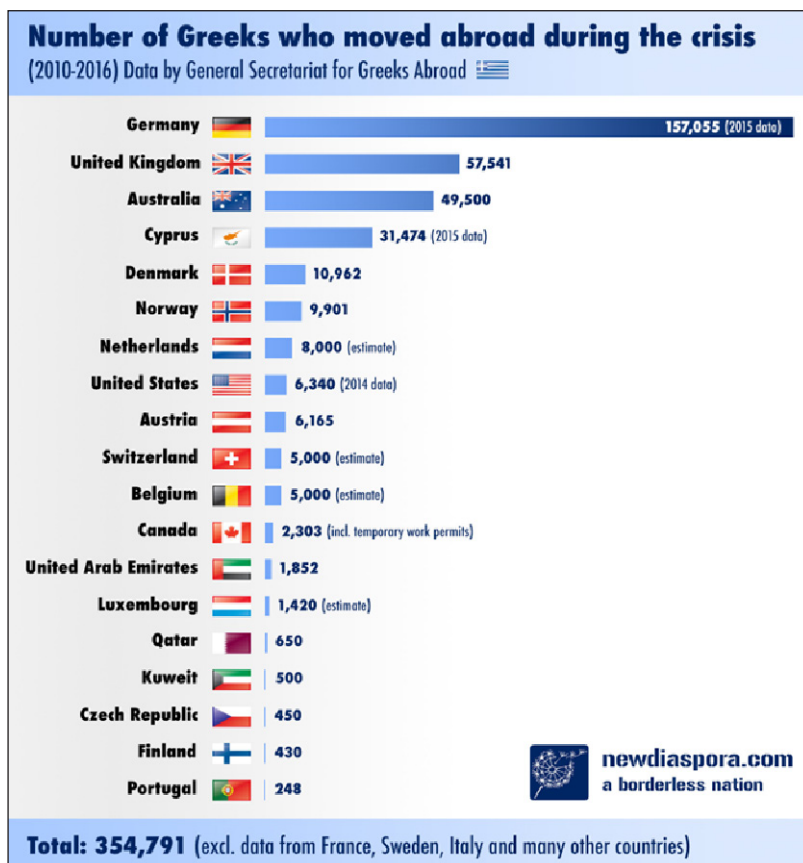


Table 1. available at

<https://www.newdiaspora.com/the-number-of-greeks-who-moved-abroad-during-the-crisis/>

These new immigrants, along with people who immigrated during the 50s' and 60s constitute the first generation of GHS. They are more proficient than all other generations, demonstrate a monocultural (Greek) identity and, in some cases, they reject the language and culture of the dominant society. The term 1.5 generation or 1.5G, although not widely used, refers to first-generation immigrants who immigrated to the new country before or during their early teens, ages 6-12. They earn the label "1.5 generation" because while they spend their formative years engaging in assimilation and socialization in the new country, they often still maintain native language, cultural traits and even national identities from their country of origin. The second-generation refers to the U.S.-born children of foreign-born parents who are characterized by simultaneous or sequential early bilingualism, depending on the time of the initial exposure to both languages. In

both groups, however, Greek is the weaker one due to the limited exposure and input as well as the shift in the functional needs (the host country language is the formal language of education and the dominant language of the society). Being under the influence of two cultural systems, second-generation HSs often undergo a demanding process of choosing an identity, which may result in the rejection of Greek language and culture, more rarely in the rejection of the majority language and culture or, finally in a bilingual-bicultural identity (Lambert 1975). In the third-generation (which refers to the US-born children of 2nd generation US-born parents), language attrition is predominant (Carreira & Kagan 2011) and quite often accompanied by a monocultural identity. Furthermore, previous research has shown that that younger learners are more at risk to lose proficiency in their HL (Carreira & Kagan 2011).

According to Gavriilidou & Mitits (2021) GHSs living in USA are mainly born in the USA or arrived there at an early age <14. For the half of them Greek was first in the order of acquisition while for the other half it was English; the majority of them received more than 4 years of instruction in Greek at community schools. They often travel to Greece during summer holidays, and they mainly speak only English in everyday communication since there is a dramatic decline in their use of Greek as they age. Some of them, however, continue to function in two languages, a mixture of English and Greek when communicating with persons of the first generation. They rate their writing as the least developed of their skills in Greek, followed by reading, speaking, and listening in which they feel more confident. There is great variation in second and third-generation HSs' proficiency in Greek. The more their parents have engaged them in cultural and social activities associated with Greek Community and culture, the higher sense of appreciation for Greek language and culture the children have. In such cases, second-generation HSs combine Greek and American culture and adopt a bicultural Greek-American identity. Finally, there is often family support in maintaining Greek and a very positive attitude towards it.

## **2.2. Greek education for GHSs in the USA**

Greek HSs need to be educated in their HL. Three are the main types of education establishments where GHSs can receive education in Greek:

a) Private bilingual full-day schools often (but not necessarily) run by Greek Orthodox churches in the USA with a bilingual English and Greek curriculum, which in recent years also attract non-Greek English-speaking students who wish to be exposed to a less spoken language. St. Demetrios Preparatory School in Astoria, St. Nicholas School in Flushing, Hellenic American Academy in Deerfield, Korais elementary School in Palos Hills or Pythagoras Greek School in Des Plaines belong to this category.

b) Afternoon and Saturday schools with only a Greek-language curriculum run by Greek Orthodox churches in the USA which supplement public or private schools in English. Children in these schools learn the rudiments of the Greek Orthodox faith along with Greek language and culture (Kunkelman 1990). In these schools, teachers are usually volunteers, with no previous teacher training, teaching methods are often outdated and traditional and pedagogic material is often obsolete; as a result, these schools are not always attractive to young Greek HSs. However, since the US educational system does not prioritize bilingualism in different heritage languages, specifically in Greek, such programs fill this void and play a crucial role in Greek language and culture maintenance. Thus, such programs in combination with the education received by HSs in mainstream schools help them to acquire a unique bicultural identity and a sense of belonging to two cultures and also to assign equal status to the two cultures and languages.

c) Charter schools like the Odyssey charter School in Delaware, the Athenian Academy in Pinellas County Florida or the Socrates Academy in Matthews, North Carolina which are independently-operated public schools that have the freedom to design classrooms that meet their students' needs. "According to the first-year report of the National Study of Charter Schools, the three reasons most often cited to create a charter school are to: realize an educational vision, gain autonomy and serve a special population. For the Greek-American community, the vision and the need to serve the language and cultural needs of their ethnic community have been the driving force behind such schools." (<https://greekamericangirl.com/hellenic-charter-schools-excellence-due-to-keeping-it-greek/>)

It should be noted that there are also numerous cultural organizations and unions promoting Greek cultural heritage and traditions while online schools for teaching Greek flourished during Covid.

According to data reported in Michopoulos (2008), the total enrolment of Greek ancestry pupils was 6000 pupils in day schools and 30000 pupils in afternoon or Saturday Schools. Currently the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America holds no records of children enrolled in schools run by Greek Orthodox Churches.

### **3. THE NEW CURRICULUM FOR TEACHING GREEK AS A HL**

This section, drawing on insights from previous literature, highlights the pressing need for a new curriculum while examining the goals of heritage language (HL) education in the twenty-first century. It also explores how new HL programs should be designed to effectively address the needs of heritage speakers (HSs) and their respective heritage languages (HLs). Additionally, we showcase how these principles of good practice were applied in developing the Curriculum for Teaching Greek as a Heritage Language: A Framework for Teachers (Gavriilidou

& Mitsiaki 2022). We discuss how this curriculum aligns with the specific needs of Greek Heritage Speakers (GHSs) and provide a comprehensive overview of its distinctive features and innovations.

### **3.1. Previous curricula for teaching Heritage Greek**

For an extended period, the teaching of Greek within Greek communities in the USA lacked structure and failed to account for the unique language abilities of heritage speakers (HSs), as well as the ways in which these abilities differ from those of native speakers or L2/FL learners. Moreover, the absence of standardized curricula meant that instruction relied on outdated textbooks or materials created by, at times, inexperienced teachers. This lack of consistency resulted in significant variability in learning outcomes, as students' knowledge and skills often varied depending on the school or even the individual teacher. These challenges led to widespread demotivation among students to attend Greek schools, slowed and hindered the effective acquisition of the language, and contributed to extreme disparities in Greek proficiency levels across the community.

Only at the beginning of the new millennium, the Laboratory of Intercultural and Migratory Studies of the University of Crete (1997-2014) had developed a set of curricula for Greek in the diaspora, accompanied by rich educational material for all levels of Greek language proficiency and levels of education (Damanakis 2004; Hatzidaki 2016). The curricula take into account the cultural background of Greek learners in the diaspora and aim to strengthen biculturalism, but at the same time, they seem to constitute an attempt to combine the teaching of Greek as an L2 and an L1, ignoring the needs of HL learners. Similar efforts are being made by the Centre for the Greek Language. It is also a common practice that all the stakeholders (institutions, teachers, parents, and students) erroneously perceive the textbooks for teaching Greek as L2 as curricula.

Occasionally, specific syllabi have been developed by various schools of the Diaspora (e.g. Mattheoudakis 2017-2018 at the Odyssey Charter School, Kindergarten), while since 2011, under the auspices of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, syllabi for basic and intermediate Greek have been developed by the Institute of Modern Greek Studies of the Manolis Triantafyllidis Foundation (Checkpoint A, B). However, these syllabi comply with the principles of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR 2001), and not the American ACTFL Council commonly used in the USA and are oriented to the teaching of Greek as L2, i.e., they have a broader view of teaching and do not take into particular consideration linguistic and socio-cultural characteristics of GHL learners neither are they tailor-made to the educational needs of the specific target group.



### 3.2. Why a new curriculum for teaching Heritage Greek?

Before presenting the new curriculum in detail, it is essential to address why a new curriculum was necessary for teaching Greek in the USA, especially in light of the challenges posed by previous materials.

In most cases, the official teaching of HLs, coordinated by the host/residence country, i.e. the USA, is influenced by the Proficiency Movement and the principles and descriptors of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) which approaches HLs as foreign languages. Formal curricula are based on macro-approaches to teaching, such as the communicative approach, placing the emphasis on authentic meaningful communication. Language examinations for adolescent pupils and students in various American universities are also based on this concept. At the same time, many teaching and study programs are developed by educational institutions in the home country, e.g., Greece, Spain, Russia respectively, as well as by community bodies, such as the Church (see also Hatzidakis 2016), and often try to align themselves with the official educational policy of the host country's institutions. However, the previous teaching materials so far used for teaching Greek (see 3.1. above) were atheoretical and the newer curricula were compiled following the principles of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages ignoring the ACTFL actually used in the American education system. So a new curriculum was needed to adopt the principles and descriptors of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) in teaching Greek as a heritage language and not as SL/FL.

Additionally, the educational policies already in place for Greek HL teaching seemed to be problematic in terms of their effectiveness, as they had to address challenges such as lack of funding and trained teaching staff, but also inadequate diagnostic assessment and placement (Beaudrie 2015) in the design and implementation of courses in Greek HL, in whatever formal or informal education structure they belong to. Furthermore, the time allocated per week for teaching Greek was proved to be insufficient to develop strong literacy skills in a HL. Therefore a new curriculum was needed to offer a) a full package of age appropriate descriptors in the form of can-do-statements, assessment tests and a guide to teachers that would be accompanied by a solid training program for the professional development of teachers who would implement it and b) a set of alternatives and extracurricular activities held in the Community so as to raise the time for teaching Greek.

It is also important to note that while curricula for heritage language (HL) learners often have broad goals, their implementation frequently falls short. In many cases, instruction is confined to traditional language teaching methods, such as drill-and-practice exercises, or focuses solely on cultural familiarization



activities without explicit language objectives. As a result, when age-appropriate cognitive academic competence is not fostered—viewing language as a social, cultural, and political system of communication—student motivation diminishes. This lack of engagement often leads to declining enrollment in HL courses, as students lose interest. Consequently, the acquisition of HLs frequently remains incomplete, with many learners achieving only basic or intermediate proficiency levels (Kisselev et al. 2020). This issue has increasingly concerned Greek heritage speakers, including parents, teachers, and other stakeholders. It also challenges the argument that prioritizing communicative competence and cultural connection over full HL acquisition is sufficient. In fact, this desired cultural connection and the preservation of diverse identities are inherently tied to linguistic empowerment. To address these challenges, a new, cognitively stimulating curriculum was essential—one tailored specifically to the interests and needs of young learners in the USA, while also accommodating their diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

The above reflections/challenges have led to a fruitful debate about the type of a curriculum or study program that can be effective for HL learners (Beaudrie 2015, 2016), which inevitably involves ideologies about what constitutes language (Leeman 2012), particularly in the case of HL learners who display dialectal features in their discourse. In this context, there has emerged a strong criticism of approaches and policies based on language proficiency, as they focus on the standard varieties of HLs, while the academic variety is favored because of its instrumental value (Carreira 2000), leaving aside the dialectal varieties that HL speakers actually use at home and in the community and limiting the rich linguistic repertoire they possess (Villa 2000; Martínez 2003). Thus, a new curriculum should also be able to promote dialectal awareness through activities that should form a part of the teaching methodology.

Finally, the research and educational community is increasingly focused on identifying teaching approaches that can significantly contribute to the linguistic, social, and ethnocultural development of heritage language (HL) students. Proficiency-based curricula, which emphasize macro-level meaning and provide rich linguistic input, promote non-structural teaching models. These approaches leverage the full linguistic repertoire of HL learners and foster cultural awareness, bilingual identity, and engagement within the HL-speaking community. However, they do not always address the development of grammatical accuracy, fluency, or the refinement of speech needed to achieve higher levels of language proficiency (Kisselev et al. 2020). Therefore, a new curriculum was necessary to integrate both micro- and macro-level teaching approaches, empowering all aspects of linguistic competence for Greek Heritage Speakers (GHSs) and enabling them to reach advanced levels of proficiency.

In response to the challenges outlined and recognizing the need to systematize the teaching of Greek as a heritage language (HL), the Higher Council and the Office of Greek Education of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America decided to develop a comprehensive curriculum for teaching Greek as a HL in the schools they oversee across the USA. This curriculum was designed as a framework to standardize both Greek language teaching and assessment.

The primary goal was to create a curriculum that would empower students from preschool through high school, ensuring that by the time they reached adolescence, they would have acquired a solid understanding of Greek language varieties, basic academic skills, and a deep familiarity with Greek culture. To achieve this, the Archdiocese entrusted the task to the members of the Linguistics Laboratory SynMorPhoSe at the Department of Greek Philology, Democritus University of Thrace (DUTH), who have extensive experience in developing curricula for teaching Greek as a first language (L1), second language (L2), or heritage language (HL).

### **3.3. Steps in compiling the new curriculum**

Building a HL curriculum is a challenging, cyclic, systematic process which, according to Beaudrie (2016), includes eight distinct steps. These steps were followed during the compilation of the new *Curriculum for Teaching Greek as a Heritage Language: A Framework for Teachers* and are detailed in what follows:

#### **Step 1: Gathering information and building an argument for the creation of an HL curriculum**

In the first step, the argumentation for the necessity of the new curriculum, its benefits and its innovation were formulated on the basis of the linguistic, social, cultural and pedagogical findings recorded in the literature on HLs in general and on Greek in particular (cf. section 2 above). Furthermore, HL programs for languages other than Greek served as models for the compilation of our program. In addition, the needs of the speakers/students were recorded through semi-structured interviews and collection of spoken productions in the framework of the project “Varieties of Greek as a Heritage Language: Creation of a Corpus and Comparative Study” (MIS 5006199) which resulted in the compilation of the GHLC (available at <https://synmorphose.gr/index.php/el/projects-gr/ghlc-gr-menu-gr/ghlc-outline>). The GHLC is the first spoken corpus of Greek as a heritage language including data from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd generation Greek heritage speakers living in Chicago, Moscow and Saint Petersburg. It contains 144.987 tokens and approximately 90 hours of recordings; it consists of three sub-corpora according to geographical criteria: the Moscow sub-corpus consisting of 23380 tokens, the

Saint Petersburg sub-corpus consisting of 29910 tokens, and the Chicago sub-corpus including 91697 tokens. The GHLC is a freely available, carefully sampled homogeneous and rich in sociolinguistic metadata corpus which contains: (a) digitized audio recordings, (b) transcriptions of the elicited narratives and conversations, and (c) metadata including demographic information, language learning history, self-rated proficiency, language use, and language learning motivational profile of 69 Greek heritage language speakers.

In addition, the voice of teachers of Greek in the USA was heard through a survey completed by 50 educators teaching in various types of schools. Most of them have been living in the U.S. for more than 20 years, do not have a degree in education or language teaching, and teach primarily in evening and Saturday schools to elementary and high school students. However, most of them have attended teacher training seminars offered by the University of Crete, the Centre for the Greek Language, the Democritus University of Thrace, and the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute. The number of students they teach ranges mainly from 6 to 15 with an average of 6 hours per week, but with a large deviation (some report only 2 hours while others report 30). Most of them are very positive about the development of a new curriculum and its implementation. Furthermore, they strongly favour a curriculum that aims at developing communication skills (mainly listening and speaking) and to a lesser or much lesser extent academic, critical, cultural, and digital skills. Because they are not trained, they prefer assessing the learning process mainly through language tests and much less through portfolios, projects and self and peer assessment. Finally, particularly useful are the teachers' observations that a Greek HL curriculum in the U.S. should distinguish levels of proficiency in Greek and provide for thematic continuity, have content that challenges, stimulates and motivates students, be available in electronic format, assist in the composition of quality and appropriate teaching materials, have a cross curricular and interdisciplinary orientation, be written in simple language (as many of them do not have a teaching degree), be inclusive of 2nd and 3rd generation learners whose parents do not speak Greek at home and generally do not necessarily empower HL learning. The above findings are of particular interest and were considered during the development of the Curriculum.

## **Step 2: Gathering resources for curriculum building**

Building a new HL curriculum requires not only the will to develop such a material, but also gathering significant resources, work, and funds for its creation. In the development of the new curriculum, all the available resources were taken into account from the start. Those were: financial (Archdiocese of America, Linguistics Laboratory +MorPhoSe grants, scholarships, etc.), teaching

(available websites, volunteers, teachers and parents who contributed to the curriculum design, organization of activities, the participation in the talks as an invited native speakers, undergraduate and postgraduate students of linguistics who offered online classes), and cultural (organizations and institutions involved in the dissemination of culture in Greece and America, such as folk dance groups, various language and dialectal communities, etc.).

### **Step 3: Investing in teacher development in HL instruction**

Greek language teaching in the Greek Archdiocese's schools is delivered either by volunteers without a degree in language teaching or by teachers without any previous experience in HL teaching. This often results in a difficulty to analyze, interpret, and adjust to HL teaching needs or to incorporate a variety of classroom strategies for adequately addressing HL learners' needs (Lacorte 2016). It was, thus, deemed important by the Greek Archdiocese to have teachers trained to work with Greek HLs. For that purpose, it co-organized with the SynMorPhoSe Lab of Democritus University of Thrace a free 30-hour training cycle on various relevant topics which included among others heritage languages and their speakers, learning strategy development, project-based learning, etc.

At the same time, for empowering the staff teaching at its schools and supporting teacher development in HL instruction, the Greek Archdiocese offered grants to HL teachers, in order to attend a 420-hour lifelong learning program entitled "Education and certification in the teaching of Greek as a HL of teachers of the Greek diaspora" offered by the curriculum development team withing the frame of the Lifelong Learning Centre of Democritus University of Thrace. This early initiative continued for two consecutive years, so that teachers are empowered in implementing the new curriculum.

Furthermore, a program of professional development was designed and implemented by the SynMorPhoSe laboratory in 2023, after the initiative of the Office of Greek Education of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America for staff training. Withing this program teachers and educators to Greek Schools had the chance to get acquainted with the new curriculum, be trained in how to design pedagogical material for Greek language teaching according to the principles of the curriculum and overall form a practice community which shares resources, knowledge and expertise.

### **Step 4: Deciding on curriculum structure and content**

The content and structure of the curriculum were designed based on the sociolinguistic and cultural profiles of Greek heritage speakers (GHSs) (Gavriilidou

& Mitits 2021; see Step 5 below) and their linguistic competencies, as identified in the Greek Heritage Language Corpus (GHLC). Efforts were made to develop a cognitively challenging curriculum that promotes strategy-based, task-based, and community-oriented learning, incorporates class differentiation, fosters cultural and dialectal awareness, and encourages critical thinking.

### **Step 5: Identifying HL students**

The semi-structured interviews revealed HL speakers/learners socio-cultural and linguistic characteristics which are in line with the literature. The interviewees were (a) first generation speakers with limited communicative competence in Greek and awareness of their ethnocultural heritage, as they come into contact with the language and culture at home and in the community, and (b) second or even third generation speakers and learners with little knowledge of the language and culture (e.g., individual words, basic knowledge that their roots go back to Greece) (Gavriildou & Mitits 2021). In the first case, they display listening and speaking skills limited to communication in informal contexts, i.e. conversational competence in informal register (everyday activities and experiences, food, family, etc.) but insufficient functional skills in contexts that require abstraction and complexity (e.g. argumentation). In both cases, formal schooling coupled with the social needs of living in the host country limited exposure to the HL and the contexts of its use, while increasing the preference for the socially dominant language (English), despite possible community contacts with Greek speakers. In fact, while at an earlier age they may not place a high value on HL with its dialectal nuances, later, as students, they often choose to “re-learn” HL (in programs like REFRESH YOUR GREEK) and improve their proficiency. And yet, HL learners show awareness of their dual identities and have a different experience of biculturalism from L2 students, i.e., as part of their home, as well as at school where they have to deal with various attitudes, behaviors and prejudices.

At the linguistic level, they show strengths in the basic vocabulary and in some idioms used in the immediate environment of the home, often with dialectal nuances (e.g. ήντουσάν, αυτού, απίδι, GHLC 2020), and in aspects of grammar that are acquired early in infancy or childhood, while other aspects of grammatical structure (verb morphology, clitic morphology, case-number-grammatical gender agreement, word order, subordination (see Montrul, Bhatt, & Girju 2015), vocabulary (academic vocabulary, appropriate use of words/distinction of concepts, cf. Anastasiadis-Symeonidis, forthcoming) and textual organization (mechanisms of coherence and consistency, cf. Swender, Martin, Rivera-Martinez & Kagan 2014) prove to be more prone to incomplete acquisition or language attrition, particularly those to which they are exposed later at school.

### **Step 6: Placing HL students in appropriate course levels**

To ensure that students will be placed in the appropriate for them level, a placement test was created as part of the curriculum and as a means to help teachers place students according to their competences and proficiency.

### **Step 7: Promoting the curriculum**

To raise awareness and ensure educators fully capitalize on the teaching opportunities offered by the new curriculum, videos<sup>2</sup> were created, and training seminars were organized. These initiatives aimed to highlight the importance of recognizing and valuing the linguistic and cultural diversity promoted by the syllabus. The seminars and videos also sought to empower educators, equipping them with the tools to implement the curriculum effectively.

It is crucial for teachers and educators to have multiple opportunities to learn about the advantages and opportunities provided by the curriculum. Key benefits to emphasize when reaching out to teachers include not only the opportunity to further develop their teaching skills but also the chance to connect with colleagues, share resources, and form a supportive professional community.

Additionally, creators of online platforms for teaching Greek (e.g., *ta ellinopoula* or *sta ellinika*, developed by the General Secretariat for Greeks Abroad and Public Diplomacy) and textbook publishers were contacted to ensure alignment with the new curriculum.

### **Step 8: Evaluating the curriculum**

Both formative and summative evaluations of the curriculum are planned. Since the primary goal of the evaluation is to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum, we will primarily employ qualitative methods. However, quantitative methods will also be used to assess the curriculum's impact on students' proficiency in Greek.

### **3.4. Articulation, Characteristics and Novelities of the New Curriculum**

The new Curriculum takes into account the previous projects run by educational institutions in Greece and America as well as recent linguistic research (Gavriilidou & Mitits 2019, 2021; Gavriilidou et al. 2019) and consists of:

- (1) an introductory reader-friendly text explaining the needs of target group (GHL students), the teaching methodology and the assessment of the learning process in pre-school and school age learners,

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CHX8hEtLcl&feature=youtu.be>

- (2) learning outcomes/objectives in the form of “can-do statements” accompanied by appropriate content and teaching material per age level and level of proficiency (syllabi),
- (3) information material for stakeholders, and
- (4) diagnostic, placement and assessment tools.

The principles and objectives are briefly presented in the introductory note of the Curriculum which explains how learning is organized and mediated (the importance of teaching Greek as a HL, its purpose, teaching approaches and evaluation of the learning process), while the content is reflected in tables in the form of learning outcomes and in thematic cycles per level of Greek proficiency for primary and secondary school (syllabi) (Gavriilidou et al. 2023).

In particular, in the introductory note, along with the purposes of the curriculum, teaching approaches suitable for the teaching of Greek as a HL are outlined, such as the communicative approach, task-based approach, project-based teaching, as well as approaches aimed at multiliteracies, content-based instruction, genre-based instruction, translanguaging, etc. For the evaluation of the learning process, alternative methods are proposed, such as observation and diary, portfolio, self- and peer evaluation.

The objectives/learning outcomes are organized on the basis of three different levels of Greek proficiency, which are matched to the school grades:

- Kindergarten,
- Pre-K1,
- Novice K1, K2 and K3,
- Intermediate (Intermediate Low: K4, K5, Intermediate Mid to High: K6-K8).

They are also classified under 11-13 thematic units, which are recycled at the three levels.

The learning outcomes within the four syllabi (Kindergarten, Novice, Intermediate Low, Intermediate Mid to High) comply with the specifications of ACTFL’s World Readiness Standards and are articulated around the following fields (in Tabular Form):

- (1) communication (interaction, interpretation, presentation),
- (2) culture (practices, products),
- (3) academic content (connections, acquisition of new knowledge),
- (4) comparisons (language, culture) and
- (5) communities (Greek community, lifelong learning).



Therefore, attention is given both to the communication and academic skills of students as well as to cultures, while promoting linguistic and cultural comparisons, the connection with experiences in the Greek community and lifelong learning. Each topic, in addition to the table containing the learning objectives/can-do statements, includes a second table with the teaching content: context, genres, grammatical awareness (pronunciation, spelling, morphology, syntax), vocabulary, as well as proposed language learning strategies and intercultural and dialectical awareness activities that should form a part of the teaching methodology. For the drafting of the can-do statements, the success and proficiency indicator criteria of the Greek as a second language in Cyprus Curriculum (Mitsiaki 2020) as well as other syllabi for heritage languages in America and worldwide were considered.

In addition, each syllabus includes some culturally related themes with the corresponding can-do statements that offer teachers the opportunity to use historical events (28 October 1940 and 25 March 1821 anniversaries, etc.) or celebrations (Thanksgiving Day, Christmas, Easter, etc.) in order both to culturally engage students and develop their language skills.

The kindergarten syllabus aims to provide rich auditory input from the Greek language and basic cultural elements in order to lay the basic foundations for the further learning of Greek by young learners with playful activities, role-playing games, dramatization, music, songs, drawing and other. At the same time, it aims at the development of the basic vocabulary, the cultivation of phonological awareness, the emerging literacy and reading skills, the strengthening of the ability to formulate hypotheses, the development of creativity, but also wider socio-emotional development.

The syllabus for the novice level aims to familiarize students with elementary communication contexts (e.g., introductions/acquaintance, information request, etc.) and the corresponding Greek vocabulary and grammatical structures, so as to develop basic communication skills and cultural awareness. At the same time, it aims at the completion of the literacy process, learners' exposure to other literacies such as digital or mathematical, the cultivation of reading, familiarization with basic elements of Greek culture (children's literature, cinema, songs, games, etc.) but also the development of the ability to mediate their experiences between Greek and English.

At the intermediate level, language and communication skills are further developed bearing in mind learners' age and cognitive maturation, and at the same time it is proposed that they become increasingly involved in Greek culture and in comparisons with the culture in which they live and interact in America. To meet the needs of intermediate students, the syllabus is divided into two parts:

(1) syllabus for Intermediate low level, with can-do statements and indicative material for students of the major grades of Primary School (K4-K5), and

(2) syllabus for Intermediate mid to High level for Junior High School students (K6-K8).

The above two syllabi include 11 thematic units, e.g., Personal stories in America and Greece or Natural landscape: from Meteora to the Grand Canyon. At the intermediate level the aim/can-do statements reflect the transition from communication skills (everyday language) to academic skills (language of media, science, argumentation). This is why multiliteracies are promoted, such as digital and media literacy, creative literacy through literature, critical literacy through comparing texts or changing voices in texts, etc. At the same time, linguistic comparisons between Greek and English proverbs and idioms are favored. The activities proposed serve the multiliteracy development objectives (debates, blogs in Greek, reading and writing for pleasure, etc.).

#### **4. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH**

This needs-based curriculum represents an attempt to systematically approach the teaching of Greek as a HL in America and align it with the students' age and their schooling practices. It takes into account the educational needs of HL learners of the Greek diaspora, both linguistic, resulting from the corpus analysis, as well as cultural and educational, revealed through the teacher training seminars and the survey results. While in line with the standards of the American Council for the teaching of foreign languages, it is differentiated in direction and content, so as to meet the specialized needs of GHL learners. It attempts to bring together the different trends in the teaching of HLs by embracing both macro-approaches that emphasize meaning and macro-approaches that focus on form. It equally values the different linguistic varieties that students have in their repertoire and promotes dialectical awareness. Finally, it is accompanied by creative proposals and rich material. Currently, training seminars on the implementation of the Curriculum in the classroom are being conducted and the feedback from the stakeholders (students, teachers, and parents) on its suitability and effectiveness is expected. Future research will focus on the determination of the evaluation criteria that will be used for assessing the curriculum's strengths, weaknesses, and outcomes.

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**Ζωή Γαβριηλίδου**  
**Δημοκρίτειο Πανεπιστήμιο Θράκης - Πανεπιστήμιο του Σικάγο**

**ΔΙΔΑΣΚΟΝΤΑΣ ΤΗΝ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΩΣ ΓΛΩΣΣΑ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΜΙΚΗΣ ΚΛΗΡΟΝΟΜΙΑΣ ΣΤΙΣ ΗΠΑ**

Περίληψη

Στόχος της παρούσας δημοσίευσης είναι να επιχειρηματολογήσει για την αναγκαιότητα δημιουργίας ενός νέου Αναλυτικού Προγράμματος για τη διδασκαλία της Ελληνικής ως Γλώσσας Πολιτισμικής Κληρονομιάς για τους ομογενείς στην Αμερική και να παρουσιάσει ενδελεχώς τα χαρακτηριστικά του νέου Αναλυτικού Προγράμματος για τη διδασκαλία της Ελληνικής ως Γλώσσας Πολιτισμικής Κληρονομιάς (Gavriilidou & Mitsiaki 2022) που δημιουργήθηκε έπειτα από πρωτοβουλία της Ιεράς Αρχιεπισκοπής Αμερικής από το Εργαστήριο Γλωσσολογίας ΣυνΜορφώση του Δ.Π.Θ. Το νέο αναλυτικό πρόγραμμα είναι γειωμένο στην αμερικανική πραγματικότητα, προέκυψε από τη μελέτη αναγκών των ομιλητών της Ελληνικής ως γλώσσας πολιτισμικής κληρονομιάς, αξιοποιεί σύγχρονες διδακτικές μεθόδους (project-based learning, διαφοροποιημένη διδασκαλία) καθώς και τις αρχές της διαπολιτισμικής εκπαίδευσης και τις προδιαγραφές των World Readiness Standards του ACTFL που αρθρώνονται γύρω από τα παρακάτω πεδία (με μορφή πίνακα): (1) επικοινωνία (διεπίδραση, ερμηνεία, παρουσίαση), (2) πολιτισμός (πρακτικές, προϊόντα), (3) ακαδημαϊκό περιεχόμενο (συνδέσεις, απόκτηση νέας γνώσης), (4) συγκρίσεις (γλώσσα, πολιτισμός) και (5) κοινότητες (ελληνική κοινότητα, διά βίου μάθηση). Η συμβολή της παρούσας δημοσίευσης έγκειται στην ανάδειξη της σημασίας σχεδιασμού αναλυτικών προγραμμάτων για ομιλητές γλωσσών πολιτισμικής κληρονομιάς που να λαμβάνουν υπόψη τις ανάγκες και τα χαρακτηριστικά της συγκεκριμένης ομάδας.

**Λέξεις-κλειδιά:** Ελληνική ως γλώσσα πολιτισμικής κληρονομιάς, Αναλυτικό Πρόγραμμα για τη διδασκαλία της Ελληνικής ως γλώσσας πολιτισμικής κληρονομιάς, Ομιλητής γλώσσας πολιτισμικής κληρονομιάς