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## TRANSLANGUAGING IN GREEK PRIMARY EDUCATION: A MICRO-ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF REFUGEE/MIGRANT STUDENTS' COMMUNICATION WITH CLASSMATES AND EDUCATORS

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### Abstract

During the last decade, hyper-diverse school classes' and, by extension, hyper-diverse society's need for inclusive strategies, has been an issue preoccupying the Greek education system, especially after the newest refugee movements from the Middle East. One of the growing matters concerning research in this context, is use of the various languages spoken by newcomer students in Greek classrooms, as first languages constitute an important value in individuals' lives and multilingualism is a reality that must be taken into account in the educational process. During the study presented in this paper, we investigated whether elements of translanguaging are used in the communication between students with a refugee/migrant background and their teachers and classmates in Greek primary school. Through micro-ethnography and a multimethod research approach, observations were carried out in two primary school units in the city of Ioannina, as well as interviews with teachers of students with a refugee/migrant background. Results showcased reduced translanguaging in communication within the school community, prevalence of monolingual teaching in the dominant cultural group's language, as well as reduced use of bridge languages, both by students and by teachers.

**Keywords:** Translanguaging, language repertoire, inclusion, students with a refugee/migrant background

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## Introduction

From 2015 to present day, Greece acquires a new role on the map of migration movements. The civil war that has been ravaging Syria since 2011 forces its population to seek safer places, in order to survive. In conjunction with the Evros fence at the end of 2012, a sharp increase in refugee arrivals is observed from the Turkish coast to the Greek islands, with people mostly originating from countries like Syria, Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq (Manesis, 2020; Sofos, 2021). Greece becomes "the gateway to Europe" and, since Europe appears as a modern Promised Land in migrants' eyes, they therefore try to find any possible way to get there. Thus, Greece becomes a transit country for people from Asia and Africa, whose ultimate goal is to reach places like Germany or Scandinavia. It turns into not only a destination but more frequently into a "perfect take-off runway to the North" (Christopoulos, 2020:145), because it is considered the entrance to the European Union, the first geographical point where refugees can feel safe and, at the same time, a beacon of hope towards the European dream for a better life. Europe, however, no longer resembles the Promised Land that refugees and migrants think it is - or once was - and, above all, it does not have need for low-wage labor, like it had in the previous century (Christopoulos, 2020:55, Koulouris, 2019).

In fact, since 2015, the European Union has enacted a series of measures to manage the growing incoming movements of asylum seekers, trying to strike a balance between its commitment to protect refugees and its attempts to keep them away from its territory. Measures include the often arbitrary definition of "safe third countries", the EU-Turkey Joint Declaration to limit asylum seekers' entries into Europe, as well as readmission agreements with migrants' origin countries in Africa and migrant transit countries, such as Turkey. However, policies such as the externalization of the EU borders and stopping of migrant movements at the border, go against people's right to free movement (Frelick, Kysel & Podkul, 2016) and in this way intensifies stereotypical reactions of society, holding back the establishment of actions for their effective reception and integration in the European space (Stergiou, 2024, in press).

In Greece's case, among many reforms for the effective integration of migrant populations, the state was called upon to renegotiate and reorganize its educational policies and practices, in efforts to integrate

migrant students in the Greek educational system, such as the reactivation of the institution of Reception Classes (Rcs) and the creation of Reception Facilities for Refugee Education (RFREs) during the 2016-2017 school year. Reception Classes operated during typical school hours, complementary to the typical class, for students with a limited comprehension of the Greek language. Reception Facilities for Refugee Education were organized to operate outside school hours, for the education of refugee students living in Refugee Accommodation Centers. This policy has been strongly criticized for being non-inclusive and for promoting segregating educational methods, as RFREs are neither connected to mainstream classes nor provide certification of a particular educational level (Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, 2017; Stergiou & Simopoulos, 2019).

Down the line, results of integrating practices for students with a refugee/migrant background in Greece are not encouraging. It may be that international organizations promote the right of all children to education, and that the involved bodies map out the global education policy based on the principles of intercultural education, but practical applications show the opposite. Despite all the state's efforts to integrate refugee and migrant children into the Greek education system, there was a clear lack of long-term perspective and organization, as well as reduced intercultural competence of educators (Stergiou & Simopoulos, 2019; Mogli, Kalbeni & Stergiou, 2020; Maligoudi & Tsaousidis, 2020; Koukou & Stergiou, 2023). When it comes to Greek society, a lot of work is needed at all levels, in order to manage otherness as a principle in promoting the integrative power of education (Askounis, 2001, Horn & Raymond, 2009).

One of the most crucial points in the efforts for refugee and migrant students' integration, is education based on multilingualism, creatively using the culturally different students' languages and finding solutions to the issue of the language barrier. In our research, we focus on the translanguaging approach in education and check whether elements of translanguaging are used in the communication between students with a refugee/migrant background and their teachers and peers in Greek primary school.

## The Translanguaging Approach in Education

The hyper-diverse social structure that has been taking shape in the last fifteen years worldwide, constantly changes socio-cultural conditions and dynamics and, in education's case, creates hyper-diverse classrooms. Education is, therefore, responsible to address school heterogeneity with the help of intercultural and inclusive education (Gay, 2013), an effort that should not be limited to the classroom but should be implemented in the entire school community and extend to the host society (Lee, 2010). Thus, the design of an educational policy that meets today's requirements, becomes imperative.

While planning such a policy, it is necessary to take into account the three main parameters in today's education: Literacy, Technology and Otherness (Cummins, Brown & Sayers (2007). Literacy is perceived as the main educational goal, new technologies both as the appropriate environment and the appropriate tool for learning, and otherness as the current condition for the student population (Skourtou, 2011:73). Considering that the future is multilingual and multi-ethnic (Tsokalidou, 2018:216), education is, hence, responsible for creating a safe space of support and empowerment of different languages and cultures. The coexistence of languages, the need to connect the past with the present and the future based on family and community elements, constitute a new reality, which shifts the goal of language education into "the development of a language repertoire, in which all language skills have a place" (Pütz, 2004:228).

According to Beacco & Byram (2007), the term "language repertoire" describes "the group of language varieties (first language, regional language, languages learned at school or on visits abroad) directed by the same speaker, in different degrees of proficiency and for different uses. This individual repertoire changes during a person's lifetime (acquiring knowledge, 'forgetting' learned languages)". Therefore, according to the multilingual approach (Hatzidaki, 2020:279) adopted by the Council of Europe in recent years, a person's language repertoire may include:

- the majority or official language (or languages) of the school
- minority/migrant languages
- modern or classical languages.

In fact, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages the language repertoire is not simply the total of the languages someone knows, but a synthesis of them (Council of Europe, 2008:133).

The promotion of the language repertoire in the school classroom can result in multiple benefits, both for the students themselves, regardless of their origin, and for society as a whole. When the relationships between a hyper-diverse society's members are supportive and interactive, that is reflected in the prosperity and progress that society enjoys in many ways. Precisely because this assumption has been realized and updated by a wealth of relevant research (Kroon & Vallen (2006) in Spotti & Kroon, 2017; Beacco & Byram, 2007; Piccardo, 2013; Preece & Marshall, 2020; Hatzidaki, 2020), sociolinguists are looking for appropriate practices, which contribute to highlighting the language repertoire. A truly important highlight in this field is translanguaging.

In international literature, the term "translanguaging" is intertwined with the research work of Ofelia García, according to whom translanguaging is the most well-known approach that emphasizes the importance of using "familiar languages" in education (García & Li, 2014). She refers, that is, to the use of the students' entire language repertoire, with the aim of learning (García et al., 2017), without attachment to social and political borders, as these are determined by the "named languages" i.e., the dominant ideologically recognized languages (Tsokolidou, 2016; Otheguy, García & Reid, 2015:281). Translanguaging encompasses the multiple language practices and strategies that bilingual speakers use on a daily basis, in order to make sense of and communicate with their bilingual environment and, hence, create meaning, share their experiences, derive and maximize their knowledge (García, 2009). Translanguaging has, therefore, been defined as "the ability of multilingual speakers to transfer between languages, treating the various languages that make up their repertoire as an integrated system" (Canagarajah, 2011:401).

In the context of education, translanguaging is related to the different linguistic practices followed during the learning process, such as translation, code-switching, parallel use of languages and transfer of information between languages. It is, however, radically different from all these simple linguistic practices, as translanguaging refers to the linguistic process in which bilingual students perform reading, writing, dialogic

discussion and gesturing, transcending the boundaries of individual languages (García, 2011:147) and focusing on their entire language repertoire. Williams identifies four educational benefits when translanguaging is used, as mentioned by Baker (2011): (a) the promotion of a deeper and fuller understanding of the language, (b) the support of the minority language, since students usually use their "strongest" language, that is, the one that makes them feel more comfortable, (c) the cooperation between the school and the student's families, and (d) the coexistence of students with different learning levels in the same classroom. Translanguaging is, thus, an educational process and practice that contributes to linguistic creativity, through the synthesis of linguistic and cultural multimodal elements (Tsokalidou, 2016) and a methodology for the application of intercultural linguistic material.

It, therefore, becomes clear that the application of translanguaging as a practice, contributes catalytically to the smooth integration of students with a refugee/migrant background into the host country's educational system. And it can be widely applied in the classroom, when the teacher can support it. Through translanguaging, students listen to, internalize, understand and, by extension, familiarize with the message, resulting in its use and externalization in another language. This whole process goes beyond the boundaries of individual languages and brings the language repertoire of every student into focus. This way, students with a refugee/migrant background begin to develop a sense of security. At the same time, a feeling of respect starts blossoming between all the students. Thereby, the appropriate conditions for interaction and integration of students with a refugee/migrant background are created, firstly in the classroom and, by extension, in the wider school community. This cultivates serious possibilities for those students' academic performance improvement, which is essential for developing a feeling of belonging in the host country (OECD, 2018:66-77).

In conclusion, it is understood that translanguaging is considered, a practice that takes into account both the interests and the elements of the personal background of each student, with the ultimate goal of interaction between the members of the school community. The benefits from this interaction create incentives for integration into the school environment, which, among

other things, is reinforced by achieving learning goals (e.g. mastering the host language).

### **Research Framework: Sampling and Methodological Choices**

Finding a common linguistic code of communication essentially contributes to the integration of students with different socio-cultural backgrounds into the host society, since it solves everyday practical issues and makes them feel like active members of a social group, motivating them to set their own personal goals. Taking the importance of effective communication in the school space into account and concerned by the integration policies of refugee and migrant students in Greek education, the purpose of our research was to investigate the use of translanguaging and language repertoire of children of different socio-cultural origins, in their communication and integration process in Greek primary school.

The research effort was carried out during the 2021-2022 school year, specifically from November 2021 to June 2022, in two primary schools in the city of Ioannina. In order to investigate the research objects in their physical space and time, the method of microethnography was used (Garcez, 2017). At the same time, a realist approach was employed, with an objective perspective as a means of ensuring validity. The research was based on a multi-method approach, employing systematic observation and semi-structured interviews, aiming to thoroughly investigate the complexity of the research subjects' behaviors (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2008:189).

Our sample was selected by purposive homogenous sampling. An important criterion for the selection was the school classes' composition, since the student body had to include students with a refugee/migrant background. Also, a 1st grade class from one school unit and a 5th grade class from another school unit were deliberately selected, in order to identify any possible differences in results, due to the students' different age groups.

Regarding 1st grade (school A), the class consisted of twelve students, six of them being students of Greek origin and six being students with a refugee/migrant background. Two of the last six lived within the urban area, while the rest lived in one of the city's two temporary accommodation facilities. In this class's case, the teacher refused to grant us an interview,

while the teacher of the respective reception class gladly agreed to contribute to the research effort.

The 5th grade class (school B) consisted of twenty-four students, only one of which was a student with a refugee/migrant background. Observation was not completed in this particular class, because the student moved to another neighborhood and a different school in the city. Wanting to continue our micro-ethnographic approach unimpededly, we decided to follow him in his new school environment and, thus, after February of 2022, the observation continued there (school C). The new class consisted of eighteen students, two of which were of refugee origin. Both the teacher of the typical class and the teacher of the reception class agreed to be interviewed for our research.

The total number of students with a refugee/migrant background in both classes where the research was conducted, was eight. Table 1 highlights some of theirs and their families' demographics.

**Table 1.** Demographic data of refugee/migrant students' families

<b>Place of origin</b>	<b>Number of students</b>
Afghanistan	3
Iraq	2
Iran	1
<b>Years in Greece</b>	
3 years	2
4 years	2
5 years	1
6 years	1
<b>Number of children in the family</b>	
3 children	2
4 children	2
5 children	2
<b>Employed parent</b>	
Yes	3 (all of them fathers)
No	3
<b>Accommodation</b>	
Urban area	4
Reception center	2

An observation sheet was designed, with the objective of investigating the role and the level of inclusion of language repertoire in the educational



process of the student body of a diverse school class. Observation focused on three educational contexts: the first concerned the typical classroom, the second concerned the reception class and the third focused on recess. Also, an observation checklist was created around the axes of a) translanguaging and its place in the school classroom, b) the existence of teachers' inclusive strategies during the learning process and c) the interaction of students during recess.

A semi-structured interview guide was used for our interviews with teachers, consisting of questions categorized into three axes: the social level, the learning level and the emotional level. The first line of questions concerned the social background and family environment of students with a refugee/migrant background. More specifically, we investigated whether teachers had information about students' origins and families, whether they were aware of their students' language repertoire, and what were their attitudes towards their students' multilingualism. The second line of questions concerned the supervisory means and teaching methods that teachers consider appropriate for a culturally diverse class, the expectations they had for students with a refugee/migrant background, as well as their potential experience and training regarding (a) teaching of Greek as a foreign/second language and (b) intercultural education. The third line of questions investigated the assessment of the socio-emotional state of students with refugee/migrant experience by their teachers. More specifically, teachers were asked to talk about the type of relationships they have observed students with a refugee/migrant background maintaining with their Greek classmates, the level of all students' participation in school events, and the ways in which they themselves contribute to the interaction of all students.

Interviews were recorded, transcribed and initially analyzed as written text (Frydaki, 2015). After collecting and systematically processing the research data of both observations and interviews, thematic analysis was used in order to, initially, code and present the research results and later interpret them, attempting to find answers to our research questions (Bryman, 2017; Tsiolis, 2018).

## Result Presentation

### Results from Systematic Observation in School Units

Results from systematic observation of students in the school environment concerned the presence of translanguaging, the inclusion of foreign students in the learning process and the interaction of students outside the classroom.

#### *Reduced Translanguaging*

In 1st grade's case, from our eighteen observations in the typical class, we detected that neither common languages, such as English, nor words from the mother tongue of the refugee students were ever used to provide instructions and explanations by the teacher. Regarding the reception class, 3 out of a total of 4 observations showcased that there was no use of the students' mother tongue to provide instructions and explanations, while there was minimal use during only one observation. Words from common languages were generally not used during the teaching process. During recess, teachers did not use any words from any of the refugee students' mother tongues, did not use any gestures or facial expressions to facilitate communication, nor words from common languages, such as English.

Findings from 5th grade were largely similar. In the typical classroom thirteen observations were conducted, from which emerged a lack of use of both common and native languages while providing instructions or explanations to students. Regarding the reception class, in most observations there was yet again no use of common or native languages to provide instructions or explanations. The only exception was when the teacher of the 5th grade's reception class asked the class's two culturally diverse students to name the days of the week in their native languages. Regarding the use of translanguaging during 5th grade's recess, we noted that there was no use of words from the widespread languages, or from the mother tongues of students with a refugee/migrant background by the teachers, just like in the 1st grade.

Therefore, the typical class, reception class and recess observation sheets all agreed that words from the children's mother tongues or common languages, such as English, were rarely used. At this age, most children have arrived in the country recently and have not yet had time to learn proper Greek. The use of their mother tongue could play a constructive role

for communication with their peers and learning in the classroom. This finding is also confirmed in an interview given by the 1st grade typical class teacher, in which he admitted that, while he initially applied techniques of matching words in Greek with the corresponding words in the children's mother tongue, he later abandoned this practice.

### ***Integration of Foreign Students***

During most of our observations, we realized that, although the teacher in the typical class included students with a refugee/migrant background in the learning process for a little while, most of the time was still spent on Greek students, while the students with a different cultural background engaged in other activities, such as painting and playing with playdough. Integration of foreign students in peer groups during recess was evident, with our observations of 1st grade's recess pointing out no culturally related rationale in students' interacting groups composition. Students chose their groups based on criteria of personal friendship or abilities in specific activities and games, and there was no proof of discrimination or marginalization against students with a refugee/migrant background. During recess, students' cooperation and willingness to resolve confrontation was evident, while tendency to help classmates in need fluctuated.

Similarly to the 1st grade, the 4 observations of 5th grade's recess showed that students had no culturally related reasoning when they made groups. At the same time, there seemed to be great cooperation and willingness to resolve conflict among the 5th grade students, while there was also a strong feeling of providing help when a classmate needed it.

### **Results from Semi-Structured Interviews with Teachers**

Interviews with teachers provided useful information regarding the use of the students' language repertoire and the management of their mother tongue in the classroom, as well as the encouragement of students with a refugee/migrant background to use the Greek language.

### ***Language Repertoire Utilization***

For the most part, children with a refugee/migrant background in the 1st grade, were mainly competent in their mother tongue, while learning Greek at the same time. Only one child in the 1st grade knew a little bit of English: "[They know] their mother tongue and essentially the Greek that we learn now.

*And English out of these children... no none [knows]... because some of them, let's say, had been moved to another camp [i.e. accommodation center] and they also knew a little English. Out of these, only one knows a little English."*

In 5th grade, most students with a refugee/migrant background understood Greek ("they understand very well!") and used mainly Greek and secondly English during school hours: "They use Greek, but they also use English quite a bit, especially if a child is from another country. I see this at school too. Especially if a child is from a country that doesn't speak Arabic, they try to speak English with them as well." Students spoke other languages too, usually two or three different ones, along with the English language ("Yes, yes. Two languages, some three, which they use in addition to English, which most know. They have two, three languages"). The main languages known by students with a refugee/migrant background, in addition to Greek and English, were Farsi, Kurdish, Arabic and Albanian.

According to the 5th grade typical class's teacher, one student knew how to speak, read and write Greek very well, was able to speak in his mother tongue and knew a little English. He spoke Greek at home too, as his family's occupation in Greece gave a significant impetus to learning the language of the host country: "Student 1, let's say, doesn't even know how to write in the language of his country, only how to speak. He doesn't have the knowledge to write or read. Some minimal English. I don't know any other language that he knows. But he knows Greek very well, at a much better level than the rest. Maybe he has stayed here for more years... student 1 also speaks Greek with his parents. They also have a shop here, so they have been forced to learn the language, they have entered into this process."

### ***Translanguaging Management***

The teacher of the 1st grade reception class, stated they had no problem with the management of the different mother tongue in the class: "Not with the 1st graders" and that they treated these students like all the other children starting school: "Essentially with the children of 1st grade... The issue is like starting with Greek from scratch. In other words, as if they were children from 1st grade who came normally. As if they are not refugees. At least that's how I treat them... That is, as if they were children who came to 1st grade, and we are starting to learn the letters". This practice is, of course, not considered effective in the direction of inclusion, since the students' different mother tongue and

cultural background were not taken into account and a rather assimilative pedagogy was promoted.

The teacher also mentioned that students with a refugee/migrant background were required to learn basic vocabulary in Greek, by matching Greek words with those in their mother tongue, often using pictures through the computer, something that, however, was not evident in our observations. *"Many times in the language book, we have pictures that these children won't be able to say to me, 'Oh miss, that's the mouse'! So there... we'll explain it... If someone knows it in their language, they'll tell me what it's called in their language... Or I'll put it on the computer to show them what it is, show them another picture. This way, just more explanation mainly in the vocabulary... in their vocabulary, I tell them, I analyze it to them more often. I will show them more pictures, we will say it again, we will say it again in their language."*

The only difficulty the teacher of the 1st grade reception class faced was teaching culturally different students Greek vocabulary, since the children, while looking at a picture, were not able to describe it using the corresponding Greek word: *"My only difficulty is simply to follow the book, to keep up. For example, there is an exercise. What is this; Fill in and then there is a picture of the moon. I am sure that they will not tell me in Greek that this is the moon. That's all. We just have to say it in their language, translate it... I think that I have difficulty with the children of 1st grade"*.

However, the same teacher mentioned that, while at the beginning of the year they matched Greek words with words in the children's mother tongue, later this stopped happening and the students' with a refugee/migrant background mother tongues were no longer used: *"I asked them to tell me words at first. Let's say, what is the word for "book" ... we matched words, especially at the beginning when they didn't know anything, nothing, we matched the words. That is, whoever knew how to say a word in his own language, they told me, we say "book" this way. So, I had also learned some very basic phrases...good morning, that stuff...and we used to say it like that, so they would understand that we were saying this [specific thing]. We have now stopped this, the truth is"*.

According to the teacher, two children with a refugee/migrant background in the reception class almost exclusively used their mother tongue to speak to each other, both in class and during recess (*"They speak their mother tongue among themselves... Greek hardly at all, nothing"*). During class, the teacher

usually asked the two students to explain what they were saying so that they could understand: *"Let's say during the lesson here, when we start, as they start conversations with each other, I try to tell them, 'tell me too so I can understand what you are saying'... when I come in to replace a teacher, the same thing happens, they are talking to each other again, but I see that they are trying to talk to the others too, but because they do not know the vocabulary well, they end up speaking in their own language again, the two of them"*.

Two other students with refugee/migrant background spoke Greek with their classmates, but also used their native language during recess: *"For example student 4 hangs out with the kids in her class, let's say Greek kids, so she speaks Greek especially during recess. But she also plays with her sister, so she talks to her sister in her own language too... Student 5, for example, has been in Greece for years, so he speaks Greek. He mainly speaks Greek."* There was also a student that generally did not speak during recess, either in his native language or in Greek: *"Student 8 was the most isolated, he had no contacts at all. So, during recess, he avoided talking in general. Any language. Neither his, nor...none, nothing!"*.

It, thus, becomes evident that the mother tongues of students with a refugee/migrant background were only present in the reception class. Even in that case, their use was minimal and only to communicate with students with a similar linguistic background, while their true value was not realized by the teacher. In the typical class they were not being mentioned or used in the slightest. The teacher of the typical class rarely used some words in English while addressing students with a refugee/migrant background and addressed a specific student to act as an interpreter and convey instructions to her classmates with a refugee/migrant background. We observe here a lack of awareness of the students' cultural background as well as their language repertoire, with the teacher believing that all students with a refugee/migrant background in their class shared the same mother tongue.

Most students with a refugee/migrant background had to learn to handle different languages to some extent, as they stayed in different countries before arriving in Greece, during their families' migration: *"Yes, yes. Some languages they know, as they started from their country to get here. They had to stay in some areas for a while, so they learned some languages. They don't know them completely, their level is not that high, but they can communicate, basic knowledge like that"*. For example, a student in 5th grade knew Arabic,

English, a little Kurdish, a little Farsi and a little Turkish. At home he spoke Arabic with his family. He had acquired various language skills due to his family's migration background in different countries until they arrived in Greece: *"Student 2 knows Arabic, he knows how to speak a little Kurdish, a little Farsi, a little bit of everything. It's also because they moved, and it took them a long time to get here. And from time to time they have told me some words in Turkish and that they also know English. And at a good level already... Student 2 speaks Arabic at home."*

Managing mother tongues in 5th grade was usually not considered necessary, since most students with a refugee/migrant background already attended in that grade for at least three years. When necessary, the teacher of the reception class used English, because they did not know Arabic and Farsi. They would also ask help from one student who knew Greek and Arabic well, asking them to translate something for the other students. *"At the level that the older students are, having attended at least three years in this grade, their level is very good, they understand everything. If I need something... I will use English as my first choice because I know it... Farsi, that student 1 speaks, is a very difficult language... and then they might need to translate something between them. For example, student 3, who knows how, will translate to the other two and help that way."*

Finally, regarding the use of native language words, it is worth noting that the reception class textbook provides a translation of many Greek terms into Arabic, English and Farsi *"And in the book itself most of the words we learn or some grammatical phenomenon or some syntactic phenomenon there is a translation in Arabic, English and Farsi. So, we have 3 languages, 3 options besides Greek and we translate every word... if we inflect a verb, the same verb exist [in the textbook] in Arabic, so we say it like that, for the kids who understand. Student 2 knows how to speak Arabic very well, so he understands it and compares it [to its Greek equivalent]."*

The same teacher encouraged students with a refugee/migrant background to communicate with them in a combination of Greek and their mother tongue, with interpretation provided by students who knew the Greek language better, and sometimes also using English: *"Greek when someone will say something, so that someone who knows [Greek] better will explain it to me... Yes, so, to me they will try to say it using a little Greek, a little English, a little in*

*their own [language], a little sign language, they will try to explain. Among themselves, to say what they want, they will say it in their own language”.*

### **Discussion – Conclusion**

Taking all our findings into account, we conclude that many educators still seem to be unaware of the benefits translanguaging can have for the more effective inclusion of students with a refugee/migrant background in school and, by extension, in the host society. It is important to note that during our observations translanguaging was barely used, rather unconsciously, by a typical class teacher, in order to explain an assignment to a student with a refugee/migrant background. Let's not forget that, while there is a special manual offered, that encourages multilingualism in the classroom, that does not seem to be used in practice. Findings of previous research also confirm the lack of translanguaging in Greek education (Tsokalidou, 2015). At the same time, we find that teacher's descriptions of their translanguaging efforts in everyday school life did not always agree with findings from our observations. This fact proves a disparity between teacher's interpretation of interculturally sensitive pedagogy and the reality of the situation as it is reflected in the context of the school classroom during the educational process. In any case, as established both by our observation and by interviews with teachers, even when an initial attempt was made to present the native language of students with a refugee/migrant background, this technique was soon abandoned, when those students began to understand and produce the host language to some extent.

It is also worth mentioning that there were limited elements of translanguaging even in communication between students. Although students seemed able to find a common communication code, if they were aware that use of their language repertoire is acceptable and can actually increase their self-confidence and facilitate their daily communication inside and outside the classroom, eventually they would most likely feel confident to use it more often.

The modern Greek school is multicultural in nature, a fact that should seriously concern the decision-makers. The practice of successfully integrating students with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds is a one-way street, a practice our research showcases that Greek primary education is struggling with. Respect and utilization of linguistic and



cultural diversity can lead to highlighting of bilingualism's great value in education, playing a great role in the development of well-rounded personalities. It is, therefore, crucial to update pedagogical methods and practices, not only in Greek primary education, but in the entire Greek educational system, as well as to renegotiate educational priorities, so as to holistically promote translanguaging through students' contact with other linguistic and cultural codes, as well as the creative use of students' background in the learning process. Greek primary school will, thus, be able to lay the foundations from an early stage, for future European and global citizens, who can not only coexist in a multicultural pluralistic society, but also interact and communicate effectively with all its members.

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