

Greek Language in Australia: A Synoptic Appraisal

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Abstract

Greek began to be used in Australia in 1829, however the first systematic schools for the children of pioneer settlers were established and operated in 1898 by the historic Grek Communities in Melbourne and Sydney. Until 1950, Greek-language education remained unstructured and incomplete due to the scattered and weak Greek settlements in the vast country. The settlement of 270,000 Greeks, urban proletarians, and farmers of the underprivileged countryside of Greece in the period 1949-1975, caused the establishment of strong communities and numerous regional ethnopic associations, while centers of Greek-language education operated at all levels of education.

Since 1978, Greek has been established as a subject of compulsory teaching in the state body, resulting in the number of students attending schools operated by eleven providers of Greek language education in 2004 to reach approximately 40,000. With the collapse of the White Australia Policy in 1968, and the establishment of a multicultural policy in 1971, Australia as an immigrant country, established a national language policy and promoted Greek as one of the nine widely used languages in the country.

In the period 1974-2008, the Greek language in Australia remained robust with a strong user base (340,000), with a high acceptance index (about 40,000 students learned it, of which 31% were of non-Greek-background). Greek also maintained its varying functionality within the mainstream society (used in almost all socio-economic domains, including home, school, church, shopping, sports, as a means of communication). Greek also was accepted and used within the dominant society, as a language of advertising and information, while it appeared stable in its structure, vocabulary, and even phonology.

In the period 2010-2024 there were serious demographic and linguistic changes, as Hellenism experienced the changes of the transition from the third to the fourth generation of settlers. There has been a serious weakening of Greek as an ecolect (38% of children from Greek families starting their school education no longer had had the opportunity to hear Greek at home), while it has also declined as a means of communication beyond the environment of the family and in the social and linguistic domains of Church, school, work, and public services. However, it remained as a priority language and a subject of instruction and learning by the Federal and State Governments in state schools, denominational and independent daily Greek, and afternoons, recording a slight decrease in the number of students in the first two levels of education, and strong linguistic deterioration in tertiary education. The arrival of 80,000 repatriating Australians of Greek descent and immigrants from Greece, during the period of the European Economic Crisis (2009-2020) augmented the vitality of Greek, re-introduced the teaching and learning of Greek as a mother tongue, boosted the usage of Greek in cultural social and linguistic domains and significantly restrained attrition.

Keywords

Modern Greek in Australia; language maintenance, language shift, ethnic identity, languages in contact, Greek as a language other than English, bilingualism without diglossia.

1.0 Introduction

The Greek migration and settlement circle in Oceania comprised of four important stages: the stage of exodus of approximately three hundred thousand Hellenes from their ancestral residences (1829-1974), the painful and agonizing stage of settlement in Australia and New Zealand during the pre- and post-WWII period, the stage of their socioeconomic and cultural interaction and intermingling, during the years 1975-1995 and the stage of consolidation and citizenship that followed.¹ During this period, Greek and Cypriot settlers arriving as migrants in Australia, were progressively transformed into citizens enhancing their social presence, consolidating their economic and cultural contribution, and overcoming the pre-War restrictive immigration policies and attitudes.

Usage of Greek in Australia commenced as early as 1850 and was defined by the immigration and settlement of Greek migrants from Greece and Cyprus, as well as other regions of the historic Diaspora, including Asia Minor, Romania, Egypt, and Middle Eastern countries². By the turn of the nineteenth century, Greek settlers had already established in the major cities of Australia institutions for the preservation of their ethnolinguistic identity, namely Greek Orthodox churches, Communities and schools of language and religious instructions, thereby facilitating networks for language loyalty for the pre- and post-War waves of Greek immigrants arriving in large numbers until 1974.

1.1 Some historical aspects of Greek education

The educational activities of the Greek community during the pre-WWII settlement in Australia (1898-1940) were inadequate due to demographic limitations and the nature of immigration, which remained entirely male-dominated until at least 1948. The number of families was comparatively small while concentration of Greeks in the large urban centers began only after 1935, as Greek immigrants could not be employed in state capitals cities of the Commonwealth.³ These factors did not allow the operation of systematic Greek afternoon schools on a persistent basis even in Melbourne, Perth, and Sydney⁴.

¹ For a comprehensive bibliography on Greek immigration and settlement in Australia the reader is referred to the works of H. Gilchrist 1992, 1997 and 2004; also, A. M. Tamis 1997, 2000, 2005 and 2020; also, C. Price, 1975; M. Tsounis (1975) and G. Kanarakis (1997).

² Tamis (2005) provides a substantial account of the historic and immigrant Hellenic Diaspora and its consequences for Greece and Cyprus. See also, Tamis (2022), *The History of Hellenes in Oceania* (1974-2018), Patakis Publishing, Athens.

³ Tamis (2022:67ff).

⁴ The history of the Greek ethnic education in Australia has been a subject and research since the publication of the work of M. Tsounis in 1974. See also, Tamis (1997 & 2000); also, Tamis, A. M. and E. Gavaki (2002), *From Migrants to Citizens: Greek Migration to Australia and Canada*, NCHSR, La Trobe University, Melbourne.

In Perth, in 1913, Archim. Germanos Iliou established the first part-time evening school named “Pittakos”, and in 1929 the first teacher to Australia was appointed there by the Greek government at the request of the local Greek community, receiving remuneration equal to the priest’s from the Hellenic Community of W.A. The situation in Adelaide was hopeless as the first school operated systematically there only after 1936. In Melbourne, although the local Community had established the first evening school in 1898, it was not able to secure the consistent operation of a school until the 1950s. The generosity of the regional organizations, the good heartedness of individuals, particularly businessmen, the conscientiousness of teaching staff and the anxiety of the parents saved the school from permanent closure. However, its operation was almost casual, as it was transferred from the mezzanine floor of restaurants to halls and its function was interrupted according to the economic situation of the Community and whichever dispute was in vogue at the time.

In contrast, the educational services in Sydney operated more methodically, perhaps due to the antagonism leading to a schism, between the local Greek Orthodox Community of NSW and the Council of the Cathedral of St. Sophia. Two schools were established and operated which were also used as power bases by the councils’ members during their disputes and schisms, as the children’s parents were divided in supporting one or the other faction. In Brisbane and northern Queensland, where collective associations were formed by Greeks working in the huge sugar plantations in Innisfail, Babinda, Tully, Home Hill and Townsville, evening schools operated with clergy undertaking teaching duties. In Brisbane, the local community operated the first school with the Orthodox rector Rev. Daniel Maravelis as its teacher in 1923 and in Innisfail and Townsville the first lessons began in 1928.

Metropolitan Theophylaktos (1947-1958) began a program of improving Greek education, which until that time had had no assistance or direction. His objective was for the Metropolis to take over and be responsible for the implementation of teaching programs in Greek language and culture to Greek children in Australia. Theophylaktos demanded the transfer of Greek teaching staff to Australia, the shipment of books and supporting material and financial support for the teachers. His request for free books was granted through the efforts of the *Australian Greek Association in Athens* who successfully organized the first shipment of educational books to Australia for the educational needs of community schools. The teaching grant from the Greek government was also approved in July 1948 and funds were made available at the start of the new school year of 1949.

The problem with the appointment of teachers from Greece to Australian Greek community schools was essentially a financial one: community institutions were unable to take responsibility for the salaries and maintenance of these teachers. With the financial difficulties of the early post-war years, both the communities and the Church appeared cautious about undertaking responsibility for the ever-increasing salaries of the transferred teaching staff. For this reason, the communities were prudently constrained to employ only teachers who had already immigrated to Australia. In 1977, however, the Greek Government finally decided to introduce in Australia the institution of Education Advisors and one year later appointed hundreds of seconded teachers (*apospasmenoi*) to all capital cities and the vast hinterland to serve in Greek community ethnic schools. Their contribution was substantial as they managed to revive Greek language teaching in many remote country towns, while they reinforced with their

high language competence the ethnic school environment, assisting their Australian-born colleagues⁵.

Until the 1970s the system of the afternoon Greek schools was ailing. The number of operating schools was minimal and the organization sub-standard, while children and parents made little effort towards systemic Greek language education. In Sydney, for instance, the community was running eight schools with a total of six-hundred students for the needs of forty thousand settlers. The long distances that they had to cover to access their ethnic schools and the tiredness of children at the day school, the costs to families, and the discouraging policy of the Australian Government were some of the reasons for the indifference. Furthermore, the attendance at school was not consistent as some parents used their children as interpreters, while ignorant mainstream teachers openly discouraged students of Greek from attending in preference to sport. The lessons of the afternoon school were until 1969 exclusively for primary school level. Certain problems emerging from the weekly teaching program included the variety of age groups and grade levels, the disparity between the oracy and literacy level of the students and the inadequacy of the number of teaching hours. The passion and force of the clergy-laity confrontation, leading to a deep schism in 1960, further augmented these problems. The hierarchy of the Greek Orthodox church maintained close relations with successive post WWII conservative Greek governments, ensuring the marginalization of their community opponents. Such antagonistic and acrimonious behavior was detrimental to the development of educational programs.

Even though Australians' interest in the teaching of the Ancient Greek language was expressed as early as 1814,⁶ with the operation of the school, 'Reverend Henry Futon's Classical Academy', the teaching of Modern Greek was introduced into the Government educational system only from the 1970s. The introduction of Modern Greek at the New England University in the country town of Armidale, N.S.W., drew favorable comments from the leaders of Hellenism in Australia who felt that the study of the language of the Greek migrants was a significant cultural achievement. A short time later, the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne (1973) followed the example set by New England University.

The idea for the establishment of Greek Orthodox Daily Schools, under the supervision of the Communities, was suggested initially by Metropolitan Timotheos Evangelinidis in 1934, but became the Archdiocese's official goal in 1961 when Metropolitan Ezekiel Tsoukalas proposed it at the *First All Clergy-Laity Congress*. Having a good knowledge of the American school education system, Ezekiel, who had served in Boston under Athenagoras, regarded the afternoon schools as '*schools of need, where our children would be taught the basic elements of a Greek Orthodox education*'. After 1970, when the community organizations managed to clear their initial debts and successfully canvassed the initial years of survival, they moved towards the purchase of buildings, which could be used primarily as afternoon schools and later as daily schools. On 21 August 1972, the Community of North Carlton in Melbourne bought the old Jewish School building to accommodate its afternoon primary school and its high school, giving

⁵ P. Liveriadis, the first appointed Consul for Education in Melbourne in 1977 produced a volume of the history of the appointed teachers, incorporating his own experience and memoirs in 2005, under the title: *The Greek language education as I have perceive it*.

⁶ H. Gilchrist (1997) provides a thorough account of the reverence and the emphasis that the Australian society was placing during these early years on the Ancient Greek language and culture.

it the title *St. John's Greek Orthodox College*. The same building would later accommodate the first Greek Orthodox Bilingual School of Hellenism in Australia (1978).

The successful implementation of the institution of Greek daily Orthodox schools, initiated by Archimandrite Ierotheos Kourtessis in 1978 in Melbourne, was followed by the establishment of daily schools under the authority of the church-communities in Sydney, Adelaide and Perth, based on the concept of bilingual schools which would maintain the Orthodox tradition enriched with elements of Greek culture and traditional core values. However, the main provider of Greek language education, throughout the second half of the twentieth century remained the ethnic schools, administered by the Greek communities, the church, and a consortium of independent individuals, settled primarily in Melbourne.

2.0 The Australian bilingual perspective

Australia and New Zealand, being multilingual countries, offer to sociolinguists a natural perspective for the study of the environmental factors which influence the retention of immigrant languages. Studies in this area (Haugen, 1953; Fishman, 1968) attracted much discussion and concluded that the immigrant community's efforts to maintain the mother tongue are doomed. Similar studies in Australia (Bettoni, 1981; Clyne, 1982; Tamis, 1993 and 2001) led to the conclusion that ethnic languages are restricted in use to only a few language domains. Since their arrival, most of the native speakers of Greek have been forced to interact and to communicate in the host language and thus become bilingual.

Cross-tabulating the birthplace with the religion, ancestry and the language extensively used at home, reveals that all ethnic or community languages have suffered substantial losses in the number of people who claim them since the 1986 census. However, Greek Australians in 2010 continued to demonstrate the strongest language maintenance in Australia at intergenerational level. In 2023, 98% of the remaining eighty six thousand Greek Australians born overseas use Greek regularly, while 19.6% the highest ratio in Australia – do not use English regularly. Also, even though currently Greeks maintained the highest rate of Australian citizenship (98%), if compared with any other ethnic group in Australia, their ethnolinguistic loyalty remains robust as we shall note below. Available data derived from cross-tabulations of the 2016 Australian Census suggests that 62% of Greek and Cyprus born Australians use Greek as their main language, 34% speak both Greek and English according to the occasion and only 4% use English almost exclusively. Most of the people who use English exclusively settled in Australia during pre-school age and thus although socially are foreign born, linguistically are second generation Greek Australians. It is also worth noticing that of those who use both languages, 70% spoke more Greek than English, 20% alternated evenly and only 5% spoke less Greek than English. The workplace is the most important domain of language use in determining whether Greek maintains its position amongst its native speakers. At present 22% of overseas born Greek Australians can speak in their own language at work “always”, 31% “usually”, 33% rarely and 14% “never”.

The August 2016 data, emerging from both the census and cross-tabulations incorporating the variables of language use, religion, and ancestry, suggests that among Australian born Greek Australians (second generation) the language shift to English was 10.2%

(the lowest of any ethnicity in Australia together with the Macedoslavs). It was also found that, depending on their occupation, 34% of Australian born used Greek as a main medium of communication, 42% spoke both (depending on the occasion) and 24% used English exclusively. At intergenerational level, home is the domain where Greek is mainly employed. The usage among second generation bilinguals depends on the encouraging efforts of parents, other family members and above all on the disposition of the individual speaker.

The attitude of the Church in maintaining the superposed variety in liturgy and a gradual, yet intense, shift to English (to win faithful over the second and subsequent generations) should be seen as factors inhibiting language maintenance. On the affirmative, government policies promoting ethnic or community language learning and more receptive attitudes in community have facilitated the use of Greek in other socio-economic domains (mainly in schools and institutional life). The establishment in 1978 of both state and independent bilingual primary and secondary schools in Australia has reinforced mother tongue maintenance. This is due to the making Greek not only a compulsory subject in the Greek curriculum for second and subsequent generations, but also by promoting the status of the language. In addition, in 2024, approximately five thousand students were enrolled in the nine Greek daily schools⁷ and the three state bilingual schools in Australia, where classes were conducted in Greek for an average of six hours per week. In one state bilingual school in Victoria (Lalor North Primary School) Greek was used, until recently, for at least eleven hours as a medium of instruction in certain disciplines.

The academic relevance of Greek continues to influence students and parents with its introduction as an examinable matriculation subject for tertiary entrance purposes since 1973, in which year the lectureships and the programs in Greek studies were also made at university level in NSW and Victoria. In the wider social spectrum Greek as a community language is now accepted as important for its educational and cultural values, as Greek is perceived to be as the only surviving heritage language of the European civilization.⁸

The 2021 data derived from the Australian national census, also suggests that among Australian born Greek Australians (third generation) the language shift to English was 42.2% (the lowest of any ethnicity in Australia). It was also found that eight percent of them continued

⁷ In 2024, the Greek daily Schools included St. Andrew's Grammar School in Perth; Alphington Grammar, Oakleigh Grammar, and St. John's Greek Orthodox College in Melbourne; St. Spyridon College in Unley, and St. George College in Thebarton, Adelaide; All Saints Greek Orthodox Grammar School in Belmore, St. Euphemia College in Bankstown, and St. Spyridon College in Kingsford.

⁸ It should be noted that Greek was promoted as a world heritage language to the Australian Government. Amongst the reasons that substantiate such a conclusion were: (a) Greek is the oldest and sole survival of ancient European languages bearing a linguistic tradition of 4,000 years. It has been the basis of the European civilization and naturally has fundamentally affected other languages and cultures; (b) Greek remained the language of global civilization from 480 BC to A.D. 1500 in both oral and written forms and was the official vernacular of the entire Hellenized world from Western Europe to India. Hence, the widespread use of Greek was of enormous importance to the spread of Christianity and the Hellenic civilization; (c) Greek is the sole modern descendant of the Indo-European family of languages, in which fundamental texts of Western Civilization and Christian scripture were formulated and transmitted through the ages. Even in twenty-first century Greek-speaking Patriarchates in Constantinople (Istanbul), Jerusalem, Alexandria, Cyprus, and Greece commemorate the thousand years of Greek presence in Europe, Asia, and Africa; (d) Roman Catholicism and Greek Orthodox were the two Christian worlds in Europe and Asia. The entire world of Greek Christians, incorporating the Russians, Romanians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Serbs, Macedoslavs, and Syro-Lebanese used Greek as their official language of liturgy and sermons.

to use Greek as a main medium of communication⁹, 44% spoke both (depending on the occasion) and 58% used English exclusively. The high rate of language shift to English by the third generation Greek Australians is determined by the sizable percentage of school age children that do not attend Greek language classes (currently 39%) and the fact that almost 74% of those students entering Greek language primary schools did not have any language competence in Greek.

There are many factors conducive to the retention of Greek.¹⁰ For one thing, its greater structural variance from English than Romance and Germanic language makes it more difficult for the Greek immigrant to learn English. Furthermore, the family and community – oriented Greek culture insulates Greek settlers, at least until their children start to bridge the communication gap between the two cultures. In general, Greek communities abroad have shown that their language is inseparable from their cultural ethos, and Greek is widely used amongst members in Australia, 92% of whose members reside within the metropolitan areas of State capital cities.

There are other factors, however, which are conducive to a shift from Greek, the most influential being out-marriage (*see below*). The percentage of out-marriages involving second, and third generations increased from 11% in 1972, to 32% in 1984, 2% in 2004 and 54% in 2020. This has had a marked effect on the linguistic attachment of Greek community members, as almost 60% of all Greek Australians who opt for a non-Greek spouse are male. Members of the Greek community who marry out are generally prepared to accept the spouse's culture and language, but their choice of language can change according to the interlocutor's cultural and linguistic background.

3.0 The providers of Greek Language Education

In 2000, over thirty-six thousand students attended classes in Greek provided by the **state and territory governments** (primary, secondary, distance education centers, Saturday schools of modern languages); the **independent denominational schools**, the **Greek daily schools**, **Greek community schools** (organized by the Greek Communities, the Greek Orthodox Church, and independent educational entities, especially in Victoria) and **private multilingual centers**. An additional number of one thousand four hundred and fifty students were enrolled in

⁹ They are mostly children whose parents repatriated to Australia because of the economic crisis (2009-2019), after settling permanently in Greece during the early 1980s. It was clearly stated in Μιχάλης Δαμανάκης κ. ά. (2014) that the Australian Diaspora in Greece was the second largest, after that of UK, in the world, with 135,000 Australian of Greek ancestry residing permanently in Greece. It was stated that 80,000 Australians of Greek descent had returned to Australia because of the Economic Crisis. Μιχάλης Δαμανάκης, Στέφανος Κωνσταντινίδης και Αναστάσιος Μ. Τάμης (επιμέλεια) (2014), *Νέα Μετανάστευση από και προς την Ελλάδα*, Πανεπιστήμιο Κρήτης, Κ.Ε.ΜΕ.

¹⁰ For a detailed study on the language loyalty efforts of the Greek communities in Australia and Canada the reader is referred to the study of A. M. Tamis and E. Gavaki, *From Migrants to Citizens, Greek Migration in Australia, and Canada*, 2002. See also the study of Smolicz (1977) on the attitudes towards languages by various cultures.

undergraduate and postgraduate Greek studies in ten **tertiary institutions**, both state universities as well as the Catholic University of Notre Dame in Western Australia.¹¹ In 2023, the number of students attending Greek language and culture classes in Australia was reduced from almost thirty six thousand in 2000 (Tamis, 2001) to twenty two thousand because of demographic attritional trends, the inter-generational transition from the third to fourth generation of school age children reared by the children and grandchildren of the Greek immigrants and adverse socio-economic inclinations related to superiority of English and unfavorable government policies regarding bilingualism. The overall number of students of Greek was nationally reduced to approximately twenty-one thousand eight hundred. The attrition was more persistent in government schools, where priority was given to Asian languages and trade languages, including Japanese as well as other *lingua franca*, embracing particularly French and Spanish.

Greek language programs at both primary and secondary levels varied substantially in nature, objectives, and intensity across Australia, depending upon the provider and the student composition. Government schools in SA and NSW remain the strongest providers of Greek language education in these States catering for the 60% and 41% of the total number of students attending classes in Greek, while in Victoria ethnic schools organized by community and independent sources are the strongest providers (49%). The most popular programs offered in Adelaide and Sydney are those involving Greek language as a foreign language or as a cultural oriented subject. The combined mother tongue development and second language programs are most popular in Victoria.

In 2023, information provided by State Departments of Education revealed persistent reduction in the number of students enrolled in Greek classes organized by government primary schools in South Australia and New South Wales, with parallel more substantial and more assiduous decreases in Victoria, despite the variations in the size of primary school language enrolments between States. For example, in 2005, South Australia was the State with the largest number of students attending Greek in government schools (5718) of whom 78% were of non-Greek background (NGB). In 2023, the number of students was shrunk to approximately two thousand eight hundred and the number of schools to a mere twenty-one.¹² In 2005, NSW Greek was offered to five thousand four hundred children attending government primary and secondary schools, of whom 68% were non-native speakers. Less than twenty years later the number of attending students was reduced to two thousand five hundred. In Victoria, the number of students

¹¹ Until 2017, Greek or Hellenic studies were offered in the universities of Notre Dame in WA; the University of Flinders, which also administered a Greek studies program in the University of Adelaide; the University of Darwin; La Trobe University, which also administered a Greek studies program in the University of Melbourne, Monash University and the RMIT University in Melbourne; the University of Sydney, Macquarie University, and the University of New South Wales. The following Greek Studies at tertiary level ceased to operate: Notre Dame in WA (2019); New England University (December 2005) in NSW; Monash University (2017), RMIT University (2005), Deakin University (1996) and Phillip College (1990) and the National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research, La Trobe University (2008) in Victoria; University of New South Wales in NSW (2014), whilst Macquarie University received in 2023 an ultimatum for its termination.

¹² In 2024, the government Primary Schools in SA offering Greek included: Allenby Gardens PS, Challa Gardens PS, Cowandilla PS, Glosso Community PS, Prospect PS, Renmark North PS, Renmark PS, Renmark West PS, Sturt Street Community School, The Pines School, Torrensville Ps and Unley PS. The Secondary Schools were Adelaide HS, Finton HS, Glossop HS, Norwood Morialta HS, Renmark HS, Undertale HS and Unley HS.

attending Greek classes in 2005 in government schools was four thousand, whilst in 2023 was decreased to less than one thousand nine hundred. Greek remains, as a community language, the language studied by most primary school children in NSW, attracting approximately 21% of the total number of students enrolled in the LOTE programs, while it is the second most preferred language of primary school children in SA. In government primary schools Greek is offered usually for seventy minutes in non-instructional time, that is, it is treated as a specialist area subject, while in secondary education there are normally one hundred and fifteen minutes of teaching.

In the last twenty years (2003-2023), the number of primary schools offering regular Greek language programs decreased in Victoria, in agreement with the comparatively low overall number of primary schools providing language programs. Of the approximately two hundred and ten schools offered a LOTE in Victoria of the one thousand three hundred and twenty government primary schools, only seven schools offered language program in Greek, while in NSW there were twenty-eight and in SA twenty-one. This could be interpreted that despite suggestions that the optimum age for language learning was the primary school age, the number of primary schools offering courses in Greek was low. In 2023, most of schools in Victoria, SA and NSW were offering Greek as a foreign language acquisition activity or as a culturally oriented subject for less than sixty minutes per week. The problem that most primary schools face is the inadequate training of the teachers of Greek and lack of continuity of their programs at post-primary level. There are certain deficiencies in key areas such as teaching material and staffing arrangements with the primary schools offering Greek as a second language. Most teachers teaching Greek at primary schools are Australian born with limited proficiency in Greek. Particularly in schools which provide language programs from within their own staff, teachers tend not to be trained in Greek. The reliance of numerically small schools on specialist staff, e.g., supernumerary teachers, often has adverse effects as these teachers are seen by the students and the generalist staff with some bias. Currently, the best qualified teachers are in the schools with supernumerary staff.

The function of the language programs in Greek at primary level is reported to have changed, as the Greek community in 2000s reached its last phase of settlement circle, that of consolidation and citizenship and experienced the emergence of the fourth generation of Greek Australians. The strong tendency of the 1970s and 1980s towards mother tongue development programs in primary schools have been replaced over the last twenty years with learning programs towards second language, then foreign language and finally culturally oriented language subject, also attracting students of NGB. From 1990, the number of students of NGB attending Greek in government schools surpassed the number of students who had a home background in Greek in all states, standing in 2005 on an average of 75% before their decline in 2023 to 47%. The changing function of learning Greek is reported to have eased the difficulties of the curriculum with the application of a more simplistic and constrained syllabus, based on certain communicative *clichés*, alleviating the competition in class between Greek-speaking and NGB students, which acted as a disincentive for second language learners, and led to the sharp increase of the number of students taking Greek. Greek is not offered in government primary schools in Western Australia, Queensland, Tasmania, and Northern territory (NT).

Lack of continuity on learning in post-primary schools constitutes a major problem and disincentive. There is a clear under provision of Greek language programs in secondary schools drawing from feeder primary schools. Even in South Australia, the State with the longest history

of teaching Greek in its primary schools, during the post war period, paid no real attention to the issue of continuity from primary to secondary, nor to the appointment of full-time supernumerary specialist teachers of Greek in specific primary schools.

Greek was offered at primary and secondary schools since the beginning of the 1970s in government schools in Western Australia (primary only), Victoria, South Australia, and NSW, including Distance Education Centers (Correspondence Schools) and Saturday schools of Languages. Since then, the number of students attending classes in Greek rose and declined, mainly because Greek enrolment patterns in government schools are determined mainly by the policy of the individual schools on language programs beyond Years 9 and 10, as evidenced by the fact that the secondary schools which provide a continuous language program in the Eastern States from years 7 or 8 to 12 do not exceed 15% of their total number. The decline in the number of students taking Greek in secondary schools was most pronounced at the end of Year 8 and Year 10. Greek was not included in the “core” curriculum of any government secondary school in Australia.

Greek remains in 2024 amongst the twelve most frequently taught languages in government secondary schools in SA, Victoria, and NSW, attracting approximately four per cent of the enrolments in *Languages Other Than English* (LOTE). Reinforced by the prevailing demographic characteristics, Greek reached its maximum enrolments in secondary schools in 1985, before its slow, but consistent decline, from 1993 onwards. Available data suggests that there are no gender differences in Greek enrolments at least up to Year 9. However, differences between the numbers of male and female students begin to emerge from Year 10, reaching its climax by Year 12, where female enrolments are more than double the male enrolments (74%) in all States where the subject is taught.

Despite the serious reduction in the number of students undertaking Greek at High School Certificate (Year 12), in 2005 there were over two thousand students studying Greek at matriculation level (Years 11 and 12) in Australia, while certain Universities were awarding 10% bonus mark for those students undertaking a LOTE at matriculation. In 2023, the number of matriculating students undertaking Greek nationally was decreased to less than seven hundred. The decline is partially justified by the policy of many government schools not to offer Greek as part of the normal teaching program at this level. Despite the unfavorable trends, Greek continued to be one of the most popular languages at Year 12 level. The status of Greek, its syllabus and its assessment must be improved to be conducive to learning especially amongst NGB students for the subject to attract healthier numbers at this level. Currently only a three per cent of NGB students and “false bilinguals” manage to reach the matriculation examination in Australia. NGB student enrolment will only rise substantially with the introduction of extended programs designed to cater for the needs of students with no previous or limited knowledge of Greek. This program should be enlarged to widen the catchment area within the Greek community to include students of Greek background with a non-native-like command of Greek.

In 2023, the average weekly teaching time for Greek is ninety minutes at Year 7 in most secondary schools, rising to one hundred and sixty minutes for the linguistically elite students reaching Year 12. All secondary schools offering Greek require a minimum of two years study of the subject. Current conditions on the frequency, duration and consistency of learning do not allow for positive linguistic proficiency and the improvement of language skills of their students. Parental support for the teaching of Greek in government primary and secondary schools is moderate to almost non-existent. Furthermore, as has already been noticed, there is a lack of any

real and essential co-operation, and thus continuity, between feeder primary schools and the prospective recipient secondary institution. Many Greek programs at secondary schools operate in regions with no substantial number of feeder primary schools offering the subject, or in suburbs, which used to have concentrated numbers of Greek settlers in the 1970s and 1980s, prior to their internal immigration into developing suburbs in the 1990s and 2000s.

Greek courses were also offered in the School of Languages of NSW and Victoria, to supplement the mainstream provision of Greek in each of these States. Greek and Italian remained the most popular languages in terms of the number of providing centers in the Victorian School of Languages and were offered by more than 61% of both metropolitan and country Centers.¹³ These schools offered ninety instruction hours in Greek during the year, outside regular school hours, usually on Saturdays. Although most Greek enrolments were in Years 7 to 12, language instruction was available from Year 1 to 12, while they comprised the third major provider of LOTE at matriculation level after the Greek community-based schools and the systemic government schools.¹⁴

The Independent Greek Daily Schools commenced their operation in 1978 with a transitional bilingual program founded by St. John's Greek Orthodox College in Melbourne. Since then, another eleven Greek daily schools have been established in four States, of which eight continue their services, catering for a total of over five thousand students. Two of them (St. Andrew's Grammar in Perth and Alphington Grammar in Melbourne), having as their "approved authority" the historical Greek communities in Perth and Melbourne, appear to be broad-syllabus-centered and operate on a secular non-ethnospecific basis, drawing their clientele from the mainstream society.¹⁵ One of them (St. Anargyroi College, now Oakleigh Grammar in Oakleigh) is administered by the local Greek Community of Oakleigh, another one (St. John's Greek Orthodox College has been purchased in 1992 by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese), while the remaining five¹⁶, although they have been established by local laity communities are more exposed to Church authority.

Greek Independent Schools offer their Greek language programs to students of all ability levels resulting in high retention rates amongst even NGB students from Years 1 to 10 (approximately 85%) as well as at matriculation levels amongst Greek background students. Surveyed teachers at these schools claimed that their schools were founded with a view to improving, via enhancing teaching of Greek, family cohesion and self-esteem. Alphington Grammar portrays itself as a non-denominational school and offers a second and foreign language program in Greek as a core subject. All of them, despite their intra-group politics are

¹³ The Victorian School of Languages, previously known as Saturday School of Modern languages, was established in 1935 and is currently the largest provider of LOTE in the Victorian Government school system, incorporating approximately over five hundred sessional instructors. The Saturday school of Community languages of NSW began operation in 1978 in six centers in Metropolitan Sydney offering programs in sixteen languages.

¹⁴ The number of students attending the Victorian School of Languages continued to rise from nine hundred and forty-two in 2000 to one thousand one hundred and six in 2005 and one hundred and seventy-three in 2023.

¹⁵ Currently Alphington Grammar has a NGB student intake of 69%, while St. Andrews Grammar has an even greater (83%)

¹⁶ Reference is made here to the following schools: All Saints, St. Euphemia, and St. Spyridon (NSW) and St. George and St. Spyridon in SA.

independent from higher authority, be that of Church or Government, and to a significant extent, maintain their autonomy. The Greek Government contributes substantial assistance to these schools by means of language teachers and resources but does not exercise control over their administration. The number of teaching periods in Greek varies from school to school, depending on the school philosophy and the objectives of the approved authority. Classes in Greek are offered from a minimum of five periods per week to a maximum of seven to beginner, intermediate and advanced groups.

Overall enrolment numbers have significantly declined only in St. John's Greek Orthodox College administered by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese from eight hundred and four in 1992 to less than five hundred in 2005 and two hundred and thirty students in 2024, while all other daily schools considerably increased their numbers. Available data reveal that the number of NGB students attending the independent Greek daily schools will continue to rise, with a parallel increase in the number of these schools.¹⁷

LOTE programs were not developed nor encouraged in many Independent Denominational Schools to judge by the fact that over 40% do not offer a LOTE. The teaching of Greek has been eradicated in recent years in these independent schools despite a growing interest in cross-cultural education. There were only two schools in Victoria and one in Sydney offering Greek to two hundred and eighty students at secondary level. No independent primary school offers Greek. Most independent colleges employ two curricula, separating beginners from advanced students, and working in composite classrooms. Greek is not taught in Catholic Church education, despite the enormous number of students of Greek Orthodox background attending both primary and post-primary Catholic schools in Australia. However, the ancient variety of Greek is taught to over seven hundred students in Melbourne and Sydney, administered in nine prestigious Independent Colleges.¹⁸

A major contribution to language loyalty efforts of the Greek community and Greek teaching is made by the substantial number of part-time community-based ethnic schools which operate in all States and Territories throughout Australia, administered by the Greek Communities, the Orthodox Church, and individual educators. The main objectives of these schools include the maintenance of the mother tongue, the development of cultural awareness and the support of family cohesion and ethnic identity. Available data suggest that in 2023 almost twelve thousand students study Greek in more than three hundred after-hour community schools in Australia, comprising approximately 41% of all Ethnic schools operating in Australia and catering for fifty-one LOTEs. Apart from Victoria, almost all Greek Ethnic schools are community-based establishments, administered by local Greek communities and the Church. In Melbourne, many schools are organized by individuals and organizations without religious affiliations, administered by an independent school body and an executive board of directors. A rather substantial number of students (proportionally averaging 4%) attend private classes in

¹⁷ In 2005, in South Australia the local Greek communities operate two Independent Daily Schools, St. George's is administered by the Greek Orthodox Community of Thebarton and St. Spyridon's by the Greek Orthodox Community of Unley.

¹⁸ Ancient Greek courses are being offered amongst the most prestigious colleges in Sydney and Melbourne, including Pymble Ladies College, Caulfield Grammar, Xavier, and Scots Colleges.

Victoria and NSW. In fact, since 1984 the number of students enrolled at independently run community schools in Victoria was higher than all other providers together.¹⁹

The structure of Greek Ethnic schools differs from a single teacher schools set up at the request of a community group or a brotherhood or at their initiative of an individual, to more complex establishments which may retain their autonomy or depend on intermediate community authorities which carry responsibility or act as the approved authority for a greater number of schools operating in different suburbs. Most community groups (70%) in all States and Territories have their own buildings and facilities which are utilized as ethnic school classes; however, most independent Greek ethnic schools (95%) hold their own classes in Government, Anglican and Catholic schools. Many schools councils impose excessive hiring fees, restrictions and conditions which could not be met by the directors of the Greek afternoon schools forcing them to change the venues for their classes regularly.

The lack of an official policy securing the registration of the Greek ethnic schools to an educational authority should be viewed as the major reason for the absence of proper accreditation and accountability and the low prestige that they enjoy, particularly by professional educators. However, the existence of over one hundred and eight parochial Greek Communities and Orthodox Parishes and over six hundred brotherhoods and associations in Australia makes the notion of accountability complex and subtle. Greek ethnic schools have an open admission policy and accept all children and adults regardless of ethnic background. Available data reveal that almost 78% of all students at Greek ethnic schools use Greek at home, compared with the average 53% for other LOTEs.

Children enrolled at the Greek ethnic schools range from native speakers to those with practically no knowledge of Greek. In the intermediate level there are passive bilinguals, those with a monolingual family background and those with a bilingual, those with both parents of Greek origin and those children of mixed marriage. The most serious difficulty that many ethnic schools face is to grade together students of different ages and mixed abilities, without regard to their varying cognitive development, causing embarrassment, lack of interest, infrequent attendance, and therefore progressive shift to English. This is exacerbated in some cases, particularly in WA, Queensland, and NT, by the lack of professionally trained and qualified teachers and scarcity of teaching material. Since 2009, the immigration and repatriation of approximately eighty thousand Australians of Greek ancestry from Greece because of the Global Financial Crisis, caused a substantial revival in Greek language learning, improved the teaching of Greek as a mother tongue and efficiently resurged the usage of Greek in the domains of theatre, music, and social gatherings.²⁰

There is a growing support for ethnic schools by community members and parents arguing that they not only supplement the formal schools system, but also fulfill a more important and unique role: they reinforce the sense of ethnocultural identity. Support for ethnic schools was also expressed by the Government recognizing their role in language teaching as a

¹⁹ The largest ethnic schools in Australia included the afternoon schools administered by the historical Communities in Australia's capital state cities and the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese; *Omiros College* operating in Victoria and catering for over six hundred students in twelve school units has been one of the most popular amongst Greek independent schools.

²⁰ See Δαμανάκης *et. al.* (2014:37ff)

supplement to the language offered in formal education. Since 1990, the state governments as well as the Commonwealth, recognizing the ethnic schools' pivotal role as well as eligible to offer accreditation for internal assessment of matriculating students, supported them with a per capital grant.

It is necessary to bear in mind the lack of language methodology options within Greek teaching at ethnic schools given the limited resources. The methodology used in these schools depends on the training, age and place of birth of the teachers-in-charge and the provider of language education. Australian-born teachers with formal qualifications employ a functional approach (65%), based on activities aiming at developing the communicative skills of their students rather than at understanding individual grammatical structures. Depending on the level of education (primary – secondary) and the actual year level of their students, they rely heavily on resource material developed by the *Paideia Omogenon Program* of the University of Crete (37%), other imported textbooks from Greece and USA (48%), as well as their own (15%).

4.0 The Current State of the Greek Language

Since 1987, Greek has been classified as one of the nine priority languages of wider use in Australia and was taught in all states and territories in a variety of systems and levels of education.²¹ Network analysis shows the importance of family networks in maintaining the core culture among members of the Greek community. The over-riding attitude towards education and culture dictates maintenance of Greek as a medium of communication or as a symbol of identity. Standard Greek is the result of a synthesis of two formally competing varieties: a *Demotic* or commonly spoken Greek and *Katharevousa*, a superimposed purist and essentially written variety which, prior to 1976, enjoyed the status of the official language of the Greek State. Tamis and Gauntlett (1993) have argued that the significance of Greek for Australia derives principally from the established presence of a vast number of Greek speaking residents (estimated at three hundred and twenty thousand) and of many more thousands of Australians with ancestral, sentimental, professional, cultural, and intellectual ties with Greece and Greeks. Greek remains the sole modern descendant of the Hellenic branch of the Indo-European family of languages, in which fundamental texts of western civilization and Christian scripture were formulated and transmitted through the ages.

The vitality of the Greek language in Australia is determined by a variety of factors including the disposition of Greek community members towards it and their desire for continued distinctiveness as a group. Sociocultural factors include the existence of many speakers, the creation of broad functional areas and an adequate community network which will develop language use outside and beyond the group-controlled areas of home, church, and ethnic school. Also important are the promotion of Greek to the broader society, the perceived prestige of the language, the ability to rally institutional support from the government, education policy,

²¹ For a detailed account on the state of Greek language in Australia, the teaching providers, and the domains of language use see Tamis, A. M. and S. Gauntlett (1993), *Unlocking Australia's Language Potential*, v. 8, Modern Greek, The National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia, Canberra.

industry and media support, and demographic characteristics such as residential concentration, the birth rate, the rate of exogamy and the degree of interactional dynamics characterizing the Greek community.

Greek Australians, at the beginning of the twenty first century, as this was already discussed, continue displaying the strongest degree of ethnolinguistic vitality amongst all ethnic groups in Australia. Among the Greek settlers and their children exposed to a language-contact situation, the language loyalty towards Greek, at an inter-generational level, continues to be the strongest if compared with other ethnicities. The shift to English is determined by the steady decline in the intake of Greek migrants from Greece since 1974, the inter-ethnic marriage patterns especially in areas with low concentrations of Greeks and the attenuating effects of multiculturalism, which, although it promotes the maintenance of diverse cultures, compels the use of one common linguistic medium among the various ethnic groups.

Greek serves a wide range of purposes in Australia from the strictly utilitarian (communication for domestic and professional purposes) to cultural and ethnic identification. Some of these are open to both Greeks and non-Greeks. Thus, in the educational context, objectives can include acquisition of practical fluency skills, knowledge of the cultural context of the language, developing a sense of cross-cultural tolerance or simply development of the intellectual and linguistic capacity of the student. Greek has three main functions in Australia: (a) that of a community language employed by members of the Australian Greek community in a communicative and symbolic role, (b) that of a second language of socio-economic and political significance for Australia and (c) that of the modern sequel to the tradition of Hellenic Antiquity which is perceived to have particular cultural significance for Australia and the West as a whole.

Other factors conducive to the retention of Greek include the social isolation of large numbers of Greek immigrants and the Greek experience in Diaspora. Greek culture is different from Anglo-Australian and tends to insulate Greek immigrants, even when their children have socially integrated into the mainstream society. Recent evidence (Tamis, 2022) suggests that approximately 30% of Greek immigrants do not mix socially with any other ethnic group in Australia. They form relationships more readily with southern Europeans with whom they share similarities in culture. Large proportions of the world's Greek-speaking population have been living outside the Greek nation-state since antiquity and thus have a long tradition of loyalty to Greek language and culture. Greek is not just a medium of communication for expatriate Greeks, but a social symbol and a key ingredient of ethnic identification. Most Greek settlers (96%) believe that people of Greek descent living in Australia should have knowledge of Greek. Reasons intricately linked with preserving heritage, culture and ethnic identity account for almost 61% of the responses, whereas practical and linguistic reasons comprised 34%. Second generation respondents proportionally outnumbered their first-generation counterparts in suggesting cultural values as the main reason for language loyalty to the mother tongue.

Since the late 1950s several Greek words related particularly to food and entertainment have entered Australian English. Words such as *spanakopita*, *fetta*, *souvlaki*, *fyllo*, *kalamari*, *bouzouki*, *taramas*, *saganaki*, *zorbas* and *zorbaic* have been transferred from Greek and now constitute part of the vocabulary of many Australians. However, English influences Greek in almost all linguistic subsystems. The communicative norm of Australian Greeks can be termed an *ethnolect*, a substandard form adopted and used by an ethnic community in a language contact

situation.²² Although the total impact of English on Greek cannot be precisely measured, it can be argued that there is attrition at the inter-generational level. The attrition is not prompted by any apparent desire for assimilation or simply by any weakening of the linguistic feeling of Greek Australians but is the result of the contraction of the generally accepted norm of standard Greek. The term “contraction” is used to indicate its temporary status and to argue that an expansion to its original standard Greek norm is still possible. The degree of the contraction depends on attitude to language use, the broadening of the functions of Greek, its acceptability by the community and its stability of form. Over the last thirty years children of Greek ancestry have been given more opportunities to express themselves in Greek in public settings. The sense of inferiority experienced by early migrants and their children speaking their native tongue has faded away.

The Greek Orthodox Church might be expected to be the primary institution, which provides Greek settlers with a justification for the use of their language. However, since the beginning of the 1990's there has been a strong tendency to employ English in liturgy and pastoral care, to attract the younger generation into the congregation. Furthermore, many clergymen in Australia promote the concept of a Pan-Orthodox congregation without ethnic affiliation, to make its doctrines accessible to more Australians and to ensure that the other homodox ethnic groups are not disadvantaged on linguistic grounds.

The establishment of a higher institution for clergy and lay teachers, providing them with instruction in the Orthodox Faith has been the aspiration of the Greek Orthodox Metropolitans since 1934. Metropolitan Timotheos had the initial vision but neither the resources nor the community support. Archbishop Ezekiel, thirty years later, proposed the establishment of a preparatory seminary in Australia ‘*so we can have local clergy who, apart from anything else, would be in a better position to understand the country we live in, the environment and the attitude of our Australian-born children*’ (Tamis, 2020). He envisaged the seminary as being initially an institution equal to a high school, so that its graduates would be able to attend the Theological Ecclesiastical School of Thessaloniki, Greece. He also regarded as necessary a two-year retraining course for priests who come from Greece so they can adapt to the way of life of Hellenism in Australia. Ezekiel established a foundation account and collected the initial funds for the implementation of his vision. However, it was his successor, Archbishop Stylianos Charkianakis who moved in 1981 for the immediate realization of the project and the establishment of St. Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College. This tertiary establishment, the first of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere, commenced its operation in February 1986, as a member institute within the Sydney College of Divinity of the University of Sydney. Its students thus were provided with the opportunity of concurrently attending courses at the University of Sydney.

Australian society, even with its multicultural complexion, via its political and ecclesiastic agencies does not encourage active cross-cultural initiatives and the enhancement of any other ethnic group but the dominant Anglo-Australian. This type of multicultural environment is essentially expressed via monolingualism. Thus, in 1981 there were over ninety ethnic languages used in various language domains, including the home environment. By 2040, the linguistic environment of Australia is expected to be mainly monolingual. This tendency towards monolingualism is further reinforced by the prevalence of English as the commercial

²² A detailed analysis of the influence of English on Greek spoken in Australia is reported in Tamis, 1986.

tool of the international market and the Internet. With the termination of migration in 1975, the future of the ethnolinguistic maintenance of the Greek colony could be assessed based on its organization and its ability to rally the support of its financial and social institutions, currently administered by the second and subsequent generations. The main challenge for cultural survival remains its determination to break the insulatory intra-community barriers, encouraging mainstream society to access and cherish the Hellenic civilization. Conversely, commercial, and social activities, which thrust their members into closer contact with the Australian society, accelerate the process of integration. Thus, it is only legitimate to argue that by the year 2035 Greek will remain a robust medium of communication at home as well as in the Greek clubs and the Orthodox Church.

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