Bilingualism on the Internet: The Teaching/Learning of Greek as a Second Language in Higher Education

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In the last few years we have observed a rapid increase in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). These applications include software that aims at the teaching of first, second and foreign languages, applications on the Internet or both. The historical retrospection of CALL shows its development, beginning from its first applications in the 1960s up to this date (Warschauer and Healy, 1998). Today more possibilities exist in respect to new technologies but also theories of language learning and pedagogies that go beyond traditional orientations. This paper proposes ways in which Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can be used to enhance the teaching/learning of the Greek language in departments of Greek studies in higher education outside Greece. It describes an Internet based application for the teaching/learning of Greek as a second language, *"Λόγου χάρη"* (*Logou hari*) (Kourtis-Kazoullis, 2005), which is based on the creative analysis and production of literary texts, as well as collaboration between university classes.

Introduction

Today, more than ever before, language learning has much to gain from Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), a term coined by TESOL professionals in 1983, refers to a plethora of computer applications such as computer aided teaching and language learning including writing, multimedia, Internet, distance learning, and test taking (Fotos and Browne, 2004). The history of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), dating since the 1960s, has advanced through stages of behaviouristic, communicative and integrative approaches, where each stage is linked to different levels of technology and pedagogical approaches. From behaviouristic "drill and practice" applications in the 1960s and 1970s (Ahmad et al., 1985) to communicative CALL, based on cognitive theories of learning as a process of discovery in the late 1970s and early 1980s, to integrative CALL in the 1990s, which integrates

technology more fully and views language learning and use as an ongoing process (Warschauer and Healey, 1998), to modern approaches, CALL has advanced pedagogically, but also technologically. Today, the shift is towards humanistic approaches (Pennington and Stevens, 1992) with the emphasis placed on communication, hence the term Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). Teaching and learning are less centred on software and CD-ROMs and more on Web-based activities where the learner is in control of the content of the lessons and the process of learning (Fotos and Browne, 2004). First applications were less founded on language learning theories and were based on traditional pedagogies (Levy, 1997); however, today there is an attempt to integrate appropriate theory into applications. Many recent applications are within the context of constructivist/ progressive pedagogy (Dimitrakopoulou, 2002), which stresses teacher-student interactions that encourage students actively to construct meanings and become cognitively engaged in challenging projects and activities (Cummins, 2001). Students' prior knowledge is activated and their experience or cognitive schemata are utilised in solving problems (Cummins, 2001). Some applications go beyond constructivist/progressive pedagogy to transformative orientations (Cummins, 2001, 2000a, 2000b; Skourtou, Kourtis-Kazoullis and Cummins, 2006) which are based on collaborative critical inquiry and critical literacy (Cummins and Sayers, 1995).

Although most CALL applications, including Internet based language learning environments, are dominated by larger languages such as English, in the last few years there has been an increased interest in the creation of language learning environments for the teaching/learning of Greek as a second or foreign language. ICT can be used in a variety of ways to enhance the teaching/learning of the Greek language in departments of Greek studies in higher education outside of Greece. Departments of Greek studies can benefit from the use of ICT as university classes can participate in joint on-line courses[1] or sister class pairs (Skourtou, 2002; Skourtou, Kourtis-Kazoullis and Cummins, 2006; Skourtou and Kourtis-Kazoullis, 2000). The teaching of Greek can be supported by Internet based language learning environments such as *"Λόγου χάρη"* (*Logou hari*)[2] which is based on language learning through creative comprehension and production of literary texts, as well as collaboration between university classes (Kourtis-Kazoullis, 2005). This particular application will be outlined below in reference to theory and practice.

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[1]   Two such applications took place between courses taught at the University of the Aegean, Department of Mediterranean Studies (taught by V. Kourtis-Kazoullis) and courses taught at the University of New England, Armidale, New England (taught by K. Woodman) in the 2004–2005 academic year and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto (taught by Jim Cummins) in the 2003–2004 academic year.

[2]   Logou hari can mean "for example" or it can mean "i hari tou logou" or "the beauty of logos/language".

"*Λόγου χάρη*" (*Logou hari*): theory and practice

"Λόγου χάρη" (*Logou hari*) (see Figure 1) is an Internet based language learning environment which was developed by postgraduate students[3] under the direction of Vasilia Kourtis-Kazoullis at the University of the Aegean. This application was then hosted on the University of the Aegean web page. The postgraduate students were given a theoretical framework for the teaching of Greek as a second language, and the applications were based on the particular framework.
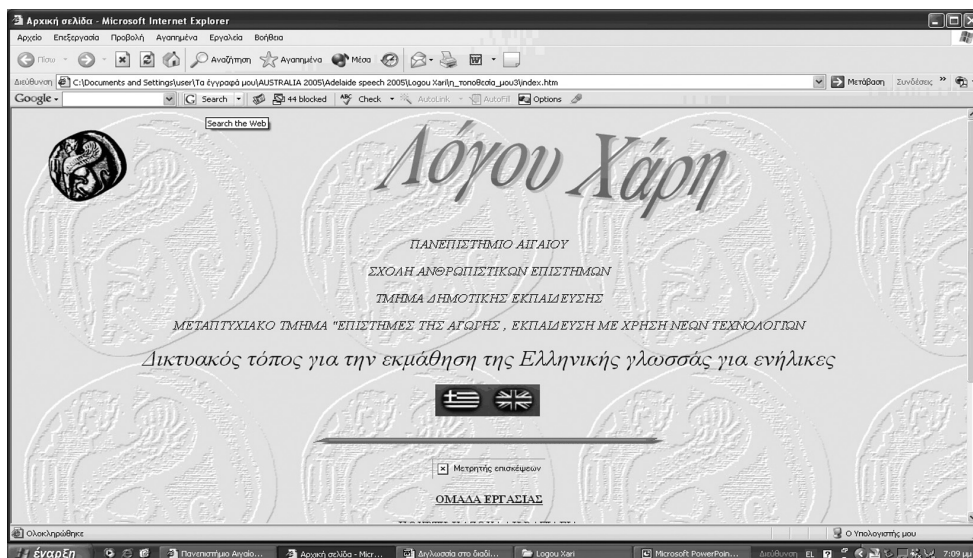

Figure 1: The web page *"Λόγου χάρη"* (*Logou hari*).

The teaching/learning of Greek as a second language is based on the creative comprehension and production of literary texts. This allows students to use the target language in an imaginative and creative manner, in contrast to traditional orientations of language learning. The main area of the web page is the work station where the students can participate in language learning activities based on three different foci: a) focus on language, b) focus on meaning and c) focus on use as outlined in the Framework for the Development of Academic Expertise (Cummins, 2001) which sketches the pedagogical underpinnings of technology-supported academic language learning.

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[3]   *"Λόγου χάρη"* was developed by the following postgraduate students: Dimitris Kladogenis, Maria Koza, Chrysanthe Koza, Gerasimos Nitsopoulos and Maria Papavasiliou. They participated in the course, "Διδασκαλία δεύτερης γλώσσας στο διαδίκτυο" (Second language learning on the Internet) taught by Vasilia Kourtis-Kazoullis in the Masters program, "Επιστήμες της Αγωγής — Εκπαίδευση με Χρήση Νέων Τεχνολογιών" (Sciences of Teaching — Education with the use of new technologies) in the Department of Primary Education, University of the Aegean.
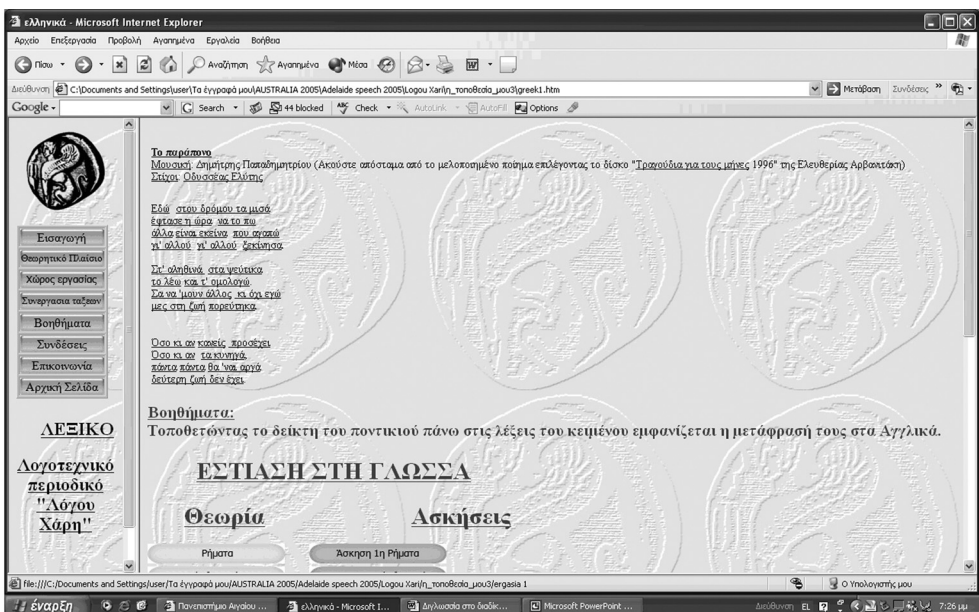
Figure 2: Each lesson (language learning activities) is based on a particular poem or literary text.

The activities are organised around a particular literary text. In this case, Odysseas Elytis' poem, "*Το παράπονο*" was used for the first lesson (see Figure 2). The students can read the poem in Greek and by placing the cursor over the words and phrases, an English translation appears (or other information), making language
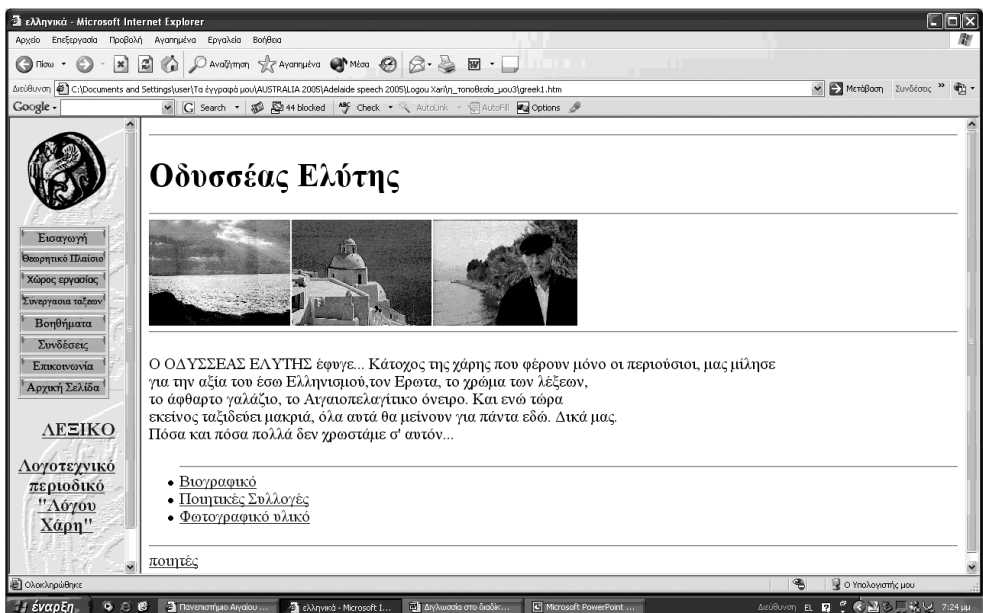

Figure 3: Links to biographical and other information about authors, poets, etc.

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input comprehensible (Krashen, 1982) and providing language learning prompts or aids (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Cummins, 2000a). This characteristic is based on the software for second language learning, *e-Lective language learning* (Cummins, 1998). Students can also hear the poem set to music and sung by a Greek singer. Also, the students can have access to information on the Internet (Tsaganou and Koutra, 1996) about the particular poet (in this case, Elytis), thereby combining language learning with culture, an important element of language learning (see Figure 3).

Language learning activities on the web page follow three foci: a) focus on language, b) focus on meaning and c) focus on use (see Figure 4). These three foci fall within the Framework for the Development of Academic Expertise (Cummins, 2000a). It combines teacher–student interactions with: a) maximum cognitive involvement, as students are engaged in higher level cognitive processes such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, i.e. critical thinking and b) maximum identity involvement (Cummins, 2000a). In this particular application, what is stressed is cognitive involvement.

Figure 4: Exercises that focus on language, on meaning and on use.

The focus on the language component aims at the development of language awareness and includes the formal aspects of the language but goes beyond these towards the development of critical language awareness (Cummins, 2000a). In *Λόγου χάρη* (*Logou hari*), students are provided with language theory and language practice. They can learn formal aspects of the language such as grammar, syntax, etc. and then go on to exercises, which provide practice in these skills. However, students do not remain at the level of formal aspects of the target language but are encouraged

to develop critical language awareness by "playing" with language in an imaginative manner. This is where literature, either comprehension or production, and especially poetry, can be most effective.

Focus on meaning involves: a) making input comprehensible and b) developing critical literacy (Cummins, 2000a). In this area, students are encouraged to understand the text, first at the level of literal comprehension, i.e. what does the text mean, and then go beyond this to a more critical comprehension, which involves critical literacy (Cummins, 2000a). Literature, and especially poetry, is a very effective means of encouraging language learners to develop critical literacy and imagination (Egan, 1992).

The focus on use component is based on the notion that students should actively use the target language in order to express themselves, their identities and their intelligence through that language (Cummins, 2000a). Studies have shown that target language use is directly related to language acquisition (Swain, 1997). In order to motivate language use, there should ideally be an authentic audience that encourages two-way communication in both oral and written modes. This is where ICT can provide motivation to use the target language. In *Λόγου χάρη* (*Logou hari*) students are guided towards creating their own literary texts. At the first level, through different tasks, they are encouraged to "play" and experiment with the text provided (in this case, "*Το παράπονο*" by Odysseas Elytis). Students are guided into producing their own texts, first by exercises and finally through creative writing tasks. Students are encouraged to publish their work in the literary journal available on the web page (see Figure 5).
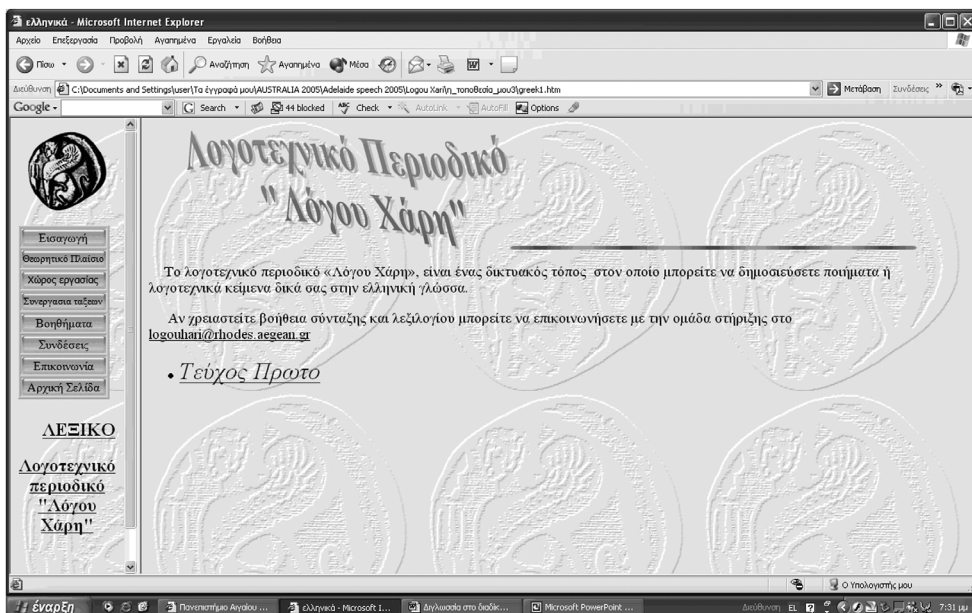

Figure 5: The literary journal *"Λόγου χάρη"* (*Logou hari*).

Students and teachers are encouraged to use the prompts provided to find sister classes willing to participate in activities that involve collaborative critical inquiry (Cummins and Sayers, 1995). In the special area, Sister-classes (*Συνεργασία τάξεων*), students and teachers are encouraged to collaborate with other classes in Greece or in other parts of the world who are also learning Greek as a second language. Sister classes can provide effective ways of learning a second language as applications can go beyond traditional pedagogical orientations and students can actively engage in the use of language (Kourtis-Kazoullis, 2001; Kourtis-Kazoullis and Cummins, 2005). In this manner, learning the target language acquires significant meaning and purpose as it is acquired actively through communication but also learned through exercises and activities on the web page. Teachers and students are provided with aids in learning such as electronic dictionaries, automatic translation web pages, and links to web pages about the Greek language and Greek literature, culture, etc. Finally, students and teachers can contact the creators of the web page by email (logouhari@rhodes.aegean.gr) for extra assistance. This involves a group of experts (Kourtis-Kazoullis, 2001) who can provide technical assistance, ideas for projects, assistance in language learning etc. What is sometimes a negative aspect of Internet applications for language learning is their impersonal nature. The object here is to make *Λόγου χάρη* (*Logou hari*) more personal and able to cater to the individuality of the learner, as much as possible.

"Λόγου χάρη" (*Logou hari*) and proficiency in the target language

ICT can be used as an effective tool in the development of language proficiency in the target language. However, a distinction must be made between three different aspects of proficiency in language: a) conversational fluency, b) discrete language skills and c) academic language proficiency (Cummins, 2000a). Conversational fluency represents the ability to carry on a conversation in face-to-face situations. This fluency involves high frequency words and simple grammatical constructions. Discrete language skills reflect specific phonological, literacy and grammatical knowledge that is acquired through either direct instruction or immersion in a literacy-and language-rich environment, either at home or at school. Academic language proficiency includes knowledge of less frequent vocabulary as well as the ability to interpret and produce complex written language (Cummins, 2000a). *"Λόγου χάρη"* (*Logou hari*) attempts to go beyond conversational proficiency and provide an appropriate environment for the learning of discrete language skills (i.e. work station — focus on language) and academic language proficiency through analysis and production of literary texts (i.e. work station — focus on meaning and use). Teachers are encouraged to set up sister classes where, at a basic level, conversational proficiency can be practised both

synchronously (on-line chat) or asynchronously (bulletin boards, email, etc.). At a more cognitively stimulating level, classes can engage in creative and collaborative joint projects.

The potential of second language learning applications on the Internet such as *"Λόγου χάρη"* (*Logou hari*)

"Technology does not constitute a method; rather, it is a resource that can be used to support a variety of approaches and methods" (Warschauer, 2002:57). ICT can complement language teaching methods in higher education in a variety of ways, provided that it goes beyond traditional methods. As depicted in this paper, computer assisted language learning can be used to increase proficiency in the target language as it can be used to support three different aspects of proficiency in language: a) conversational fluency, b) discrete language skills and c) academic language proficiency (Cummins, 2000a). It can provide domains for actual language use (Skourtou, 2005; Kazoullis, 2001). Where target language learners often face the problem of limited language input and language use, ICT can expand language domains. It can provide partners in language learning and authentic target language use. Thus, ICT or CMC can increase the amount of communication that language learners participate in (Beauvois, 1997; Kern, 1995; Warschauer, 1997 in Warner, 2004).

Clyne (2005) outlines the teaching of Greek in Australia and suggests that the Greek language be made more attractive in order to motivate more students to learn Greek. He claims that there is a decrease in the desire to learn Greek and a decrease in students learning Greek in higher, secondary and primary education, due to various social factors (Clyne, 2005). In this respect, ICT can be used to motivate students (Beauvois, 1997; Kern, 1995; Warschauer, 1997 in Warner, 2004; Kourtis-Kazoullis, 2001). It can, furthermore, foster the exchange of ideas (Beauvois, 1997; Kern, 1995; von der Emde, Schneider and Kötter, 2001; Warschauer, 1997 in Warner, 2004) as well as provide flexibility in teaching materials. Where traditional means such as textbooks cannot easily cater to diversity (individual differences of learners, needs, learning environments, etc.), ICT can provide flexibility with programs such as *e-Lective language learning* (Cummins, 1998) where teachers can choose their own target language text as input for language learning and are provided with dictionary and learning strategy supports. It can foster student autonomy; students can participate in web-based activities where the learner is in control of the content of the lessons and the process of learning (Fotos and Browne, 2004). Furthermore, it can support cognitively engaging and challenging projects and activities (Cummins, 2001) and provide an appropriate learning environment for participation in activities involving collaborative critical inquiry, critical literacy, critical language awareness (Cummins and Sayers, 1995), imagination (Egan, 1992) and creativity. It can provide support or aids in learning such as electronic

dictionaries, automatic translation web pages, and links to web pages about the Greek language and Greek literature, culture, etc. As many learners of Greek in departments of Greek studies outside Greece are members of the Greek diaspora, ICT can provide a link between the country of origin and the host country (Skourtou, 2005). Identity expression is an important element of second language learning (Tsokalidou, 2005); ICT can support the expression of student identity (Skourtou, 2005; Kourtis-Kazoullis, 2001).

Summary

Second language learning has much to gain from Information and Communication Technologies, Computer Assisted Language Learning, and in particular, applications utilising the Internet. This paper proposes ways in which ICT can be used to enhance the teaching/learning of the Greek language in departments of Greek studies in higher education outside Greece. It describes the Internet based application for the teaching/learning of Greek as a second language, *"Λόγου χάρη" (Logou hari)* (Kourtis-Kazoullis, 2005) by providing parallels between theory and practice. The language learning activities described follow three foci: a) focus on language, b) focus on meaning and c) focus on use, which fall within the Framework for the Development of Academic Expertise (Cummins, 2000a). The particular application described in this paper, *"Λόγου χάρη"* (*Logou hari*), can be expanded on to provide the basis for further applications and collaboration between university departments within Greece and departments of Greek Studies in other countries such as Australia.

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