

Teaching Greek to Albanian Students Through Shared Folk Tales: an Electronic Language Learning Environment

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Abstract

This presentation concerns a project that was implemented by the host class of an intercultural school, in the framework of teaching Greek as a second language to speakers of Albanian. More specifically, it will refer to an innovative learning teaching method that focuses on the folk tales shared by both cultures. This project was realized through the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

The aim of this program was to put use of the background knowledge of the students, to enrich their vocabulary, enhance the development of their language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and to improve their cognitive ability with respect to the structure and function of the Greek language (grammar, syntax). The current project took place in the beginners' host class and lasted 6 months. The twelve students of this class were from 6 to 11 years old. Our basic observations are summarized as follows:

- a) Apart from the language, we had to teach ICT and to collaborate with an animator as well.*
- b) The students wrote their own fairytale which served as the basis for the design of a video game aiming at the improvement of the linguistic skills of L1 Albanian learners of Greek.*
- c) The students showed improvement in the Greek language, both in oral and written communication.*

Introduction

The intercultural phenomenon which appears in modern societies often creates setbacks in their functions and leads to redefinitions of their social actions [1]. When it comes to school life however, it can become a challenge that, when handled right, can prove to be rather creative [2]. In a mixed class (of native and foreign students) the role of the teacher is detrimental. The teacher has to choose the appropriate methods and tools of action that will promote the best possible learning of the language, as well as the students' smooth socialization in their new environment. Basically he/she has to succeed at combining group teaching with individual teaching [3]. In Greece, the biggest portion of foreign students came from Albania. In the Intercultural School of Ioannina, at which this program took place, almost 60% of the student population was composed of foreign students, with 50% of them originating from Albania.

1. Host Classes

The application of the model of Intercultural Education in Greece was followed by the emergence of multicultural schools and in many schools Host Classes were also created [4]. Students attend to the linguistic class there (4 hours a day) and the rest of their curriculum in their regular classroom [5].

2. The innovative method

The innovative method referred to the teaching of Modern Greek to Albanian students through shared folk tales between the two cultures. This method was inspired by observing the reactions of the Albanian students themselves, when they identified tales in the Greek textbooks that were found in the respective Albanian textbooks as well. Our aim was to use the students' background knowledge and base the newly acquired knowledge on top of it [6]. We must point out that this particular method is considered a portion of a larger research that was conducted as part of our Ph. D.

2.1 The student's background knowledge

Students of the Beginners Host Class, in which the project was implemented, were 12 and their ages ranged from 6 to 11 years old (from December until June). The background knowledge of all the students was almost identical. Meaning that the students:

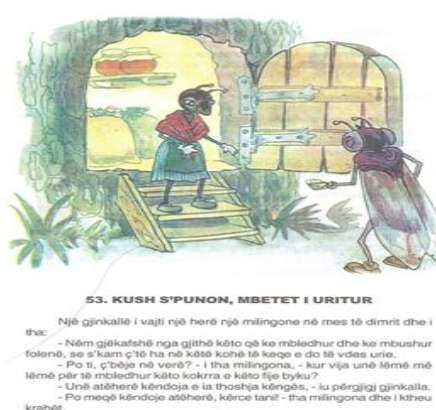
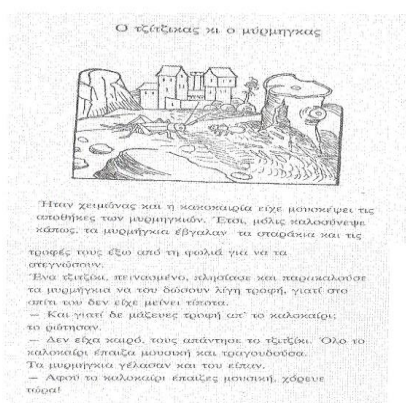
- Were familiar with the vocabulary of each tale in their mother tongue
- Had learned to read and write in Greek

- Could create, both written and oral, sentences of the Subject –Verb-Object type or S-V-Modifiers (temporal)
- They knew how to create dialogues by using simple sentences, with the help of given words and pictures

2.2 The processing of the tales

10 tales were chosen for this project, with the students having a firm grasp on them in their mother language. The processing of the tales took place with the students split in three teams of four people each and according to the principles of teamwork teaching, during which the teacher has purely a coordinating and supporting role [7]. Right after the processing of the text each student was called to answer the questionnaire about the difficulties he came across in oral, as well as in written speech. That way the collection of the research data was accomplished. For starters, each member of the project teams was given a page with the tale written in Greek, for example: “Ο τζίτζικας και ο μύρμηγκας” (one of Aesop’s fables) [8] and the equivalent Albanian tale: “Kush s’ punon mбетet i uritur” [9] fig 1.

Figure 1
The cicada and the ant
(Ο τζίτζικας και ο μύρμηγκας - *Kush s’ punon mбетet i uritur*)



After a discussion between the researcher and the students, a Teaching Contract was set. It included the way the students should process the written form of the tales. The stages of this process were the following:

- **Reading of the text**
The students start by reading the text in Albanian and then in Greek.
- **Word identification**
After they have read the passage given in Greek, the students took notes of the words they knew as well as the ones they didn't.
- **Team collaboration**
The next stage of this procedure involved teamwork between the members of each team. At first, they discussed among themselves the two given passages. Each individual presented the known/unknown words he/she had taken down. At the end of the comprehension process, regarding the vocabulary of the Greek text, they ended up using the dictionary for the words that troubled them the most.
- **Oral presentation**
Next in line was the oral presentation of the tale by each one of the teams. The reciting was performed by all members of the team sequentially. Throughout the narration the children consulted their vocabulary notes or were offered help by the rest of their team. Some teams chose dramatization as way of presenting their work.
- **Writing of the tale in Greek**
Right after the oral presentation the group gathers together and, with the help of all the members, the process of written expression begins. The person who was assigned the role of the team's secretary, takes up the task of writing down whatever the rest of the team tells him. At the same time, the discussion among the members of the group about the translation of the Albanian tale is under way.
- **Narration of the written text**

The teams wrapped up the writing of the story and the narrator of each team read the text aloud, in order for all the children in the class to be able to listen to him/her.

- **Correction of the texts**

When the presentation came to a close a conversation followed, concerning the areas of speaking and writing that troubled the students. When the difficulties were traced, we taught the respective grammatical phenomena. Then the texts were corrected by the students themselves. Finally there were certain consolidation exercises based on those grammatical phenomena.

- **Filling up the questionnaire (team evaluation)**

The concentrated report of each team's work (the difficulties they came across or the aspects that helped during the processing of the passage) was written down in the questionnaire.

- **Writing of a new tale**

When the processing of all ten tales was finally over, the children worked together and created their very own tale.

3. An electronic language learning environment

In our school the ICT course is not offered as part of the standard curriculum but is taught by a volunteer teacher during optional, afternoon classes instead. As a result some of our students knew how to use a computer, while some of the younger ones did not. So we incorporated the tutoring of how to use a personal computer within the boundaries of the program. When the students learned the basics and learned how to operate a computer on a decent level, they wrote their tale. After that, and with the help of both a volunteer artist and a programmer, an educational video game was developed, with the target audience being students of L1 language level; the game is meant to help the children enrich their existing vocabulary, as well as learn new words of the Modern Greek language. Students themselves participated in the creation of the game's multiple choice questions, through a learning-through-playing experience. During the next two years the game was used in Beginners Host Classes and in Tuition Centers' classes for the teaching and improving of Albanian students' language.

4. Results

The first expected outcome was the development of the language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) in relation to the 3 sectors of the language i.e. oral communication, reading and response. At the end of the program the difference in the students' oral and written expression was indeed obvious. The reading of the tales, the use of the dictionary, the cooperation with each other, the oral presentation of the tales and their dramatization, as well as the writing of a new tale contributed in improving their language skills quite effectively. The second expected outcome, that was the comprehension of Modern Greek's structure as a language, was fulfilled at a reasonable degree, as the processing of the texts helped the children achieve a better understanding on the language's syntax and grammar. The third expected outcome, which involved the production of oral and written speech, showed significant improvement and resulted in the student's writing their own tale independently. The completion of the questionnaire regarding the students' difficulties in speaking and in writing, which is considered to be the fourth outcome of this process, was achieved completely; moreover, it enabled the collection of all the data needed for the morphological and phonological differences between the two languages to be noted and further understood. The fifth and final outcome reached a satisfying level of accomplishment, as the students learned the basic functions of a computer and how to use them properly, and were involved in the development process of the game by creating their own hand drawn images and character concepts.

5. Conclusion and research implications

This particular document introduced an innovative method which was utilized in a Greek primary school of Intercultural Education. The application of this method lasted 3 school years. We tried to present in detail the stages of the processing of the tales, hoping that this method can be used to improve language teaching for foreign students or, better yet, to become an inspiration for the development of more innovative methods of this kind. We know that this method by itself is not enough to help students reach a certain level of language acquisition, though we firmly believe that it can function as a stimulus for further research and discovery of other methods, that will involve the student in a experiential search for knowledge.

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