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# Parents-Schools' Communication and Albanian as a Heritage Language in Greece

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## Abstract

The purpose of this chapter is to provide, in the first part, an overview of research data concerning immigrant parents-school communication in the Greek context. The focus is on Albanians as they constitute the largest immigrant group in Greece. We present data from a study which included focus-groups and group interviews with parents in order to investigate the communicative and language needs of Albanian parents with regard to their communication with the schools attended by their children. The issue of parents-school communication was also approached through the teachers' perspectives. In the second part, we present a review of Greek sociolinguistic studies relevant to the issue of Albanian as a heritage language. We draw on the issues that the field has been dealing with and on the recent research trends. Specifically, we discuss (a) Greek educational policies regarding heritage languages and (b) attitudes and practices of parents, students, and teachers concerning the use, teaching and learning of Albanian. We present data and findings of a set of qualitative and quantitative large or small-scale studies conducted in Greece during the last decade (2009–2016). The chapter will conclude with some suggestions for future directions in research and practice.

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## Keywords

Albanian heritage language • Parents-school communication

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## Introduction

The importance of parents-school communication is well documented on an international level. The challenges of communication between immigrant families and schools constitute a field that has attracted scientific interest in the last two decades (cf. Bernhard et al. 1998; Peña 2000; Worthy and Rodríguez-Galindo 2006 for North American cases). The issue of parental involvement becomes more complex, multi-dimensional, and ideologically loaded in the case of immigrant background parents, who have a language and culture other than the school language/culture. International research data have stressed the role of parental involvement as an important, supportive factor for the academic development of students of immigrant origin (Jeynes 2003; Martinez et al. 2004; Kao 2004; Kim 2002) and in this context, plenty of good practices and educational interventions have already been planned and implemented. In the Greek context, research into sociolinguistic issues among immigrant families has developed rather recently, focusing mostly on the Albanian immigrants, who constitute the largest ethnic group in the country (Gkaintartzi 2014a).

## Overview of Immigrant Parents-School Communication in the Greek Context

Research studies on this issue in Greece remain rare (Chatzidaki 2007; Damanakis 1997), whereas the difficulty in communication and collaboration between the schools, attended by students with immigrant backgrounds and the immigrant families, which have limited skills in Greek, imposes the need to find solutions (Androulakis 2013). On the one hand, the dominant view in the Greek school context concerning immigrant parents' participation in their children's school education is that they are involved very little and in an incomplete way, conceiving of

involvement mostly as contacting and visiting the school, participation in its activities, and helping with homework (Chatzidaki 2007). Immigrant parents, on the other hand, face obstacles in communicating with their children's schools, which are related to lack of competence in the majority language, long working hours, their status of residence, difficulties in understanding the school process, etc. (Gkaintartzi 2012).

Parent-school communication is also hindered by the different beliefs, attitudes, and expectations of parents on the one hand and teachers on the other. Relevant research data in Greece have indicated that a large number of teachers believe that immigrant parents do not participate in their children's school education either because they cannot or they are not interested (Damanakis 1997). Moreover, teachers are reported to believe that immigrant parents have average or limited educational expectations for their children and thus consider their attitude toward the Greek school as "indifferent" (Damanakis 1997, p. 187). Similar more recent qualitative data have shown that teachers attribute immigrant students' learning difficulties to their deprived – economically, educationally, and linguistically – family environment and think that immigrant parents are not interested in their children's education (Kasimi 2005). It is also pointed out that most teachers interpret immigrant families' attitudes towards the school based on their socio-economic status and in general hold a negative view of their potential involvement in their children's education (*ibid*). Teachers tend to attribute immigrant parents' cooperative attitude toward the school also to the future plans of the families (repatriation or permanent residence) (Kontogianni 2009). Kindergarten teachers are also reported to consider immigrant parents' communication with the schools as limited but on the other hand believe that home-school cooperation is an "extra burden" for them and unnecessary (Pantazis 2006).

Most of the above research data have confirmed that teachers in majority believe that immigrant parents are not involved in their children's education. It is also pointed out that teachers' negative representations are so powerful that affect even those with no personal experience with immigrant families (Chatzidaki 2007). Their view of parental involvement is thus characterized as "hegemonic," since they devalue their capital and do not recognize their diversity. Another study on kindergarten teachers has shown that although teachers promote immigrant parents' involvement, encouraging them to participate mostly in group cooperative activities and events, they do not actively involve them in the school learning processes (Kontogianni 2009). They also consider them as cooperative toward the school, a (different) finding which can be interpreted upon the less demanding, more "favorable," and thus accessible for communication environment of the kindergarten school (Kontogianni 2009).

However, it seems that the dominant view of parental involvement from the teachers' perspectives does not take into account the existing difficulties, which immigrant parents face in communicating with the school, the different linguistic and cultural capital nor the different beliefs and perspectives these families may hold regarding the issue. This gap between teachers' and parents' construction of the concept of parental involvement and its content is documented by an ethnographic study, investigating in a composite way language views and practices from the three

perspectives of teachers, immigrant parents, and their children (Gkaintartzi 2012). According to its research data, parents, mostly mothers who do not work, report that they have undertaken the role of helping, supporting, and checking their children with their homework, especially in the first primary classes, while they themselves have learnt to read and write in Greek through this process. They mostly conceive of their role as helping their children at home and devoting time to their homework. They also express their agony, concern, and active interest in their children's school progress, stating their investment in the Greek language for their future academic and social development and trying to fulfill their role towards the schools' demands concerning school (language) learning, often implying their conflicts and dilemmas. They even adjust their language choice patterns in the home context and choose to speak Greek exclusively with them, when assisting them, in order to support them more with their school learning, as shown in the following extract from an Albanian father:

### Interview Excerpt

I speak with Entri Greek and Albanian, because when we do his homework, we speak mostly Greek, of course he can write better than me, his spelling and so, because he has learnt it, while I can read and understand all the books and I help him do his homework, to be prepared for the next day, to go to school, to have the homework done. And OK we speak Greek, almost, but only, except from the school homework, when we finish it, I try to speak Albanian, so as not to forget, to know everything in Albanian too, not to forget[. . .] It is just that Greek attracts him more now, because he learns it at school too and it attracts him more but nevertheless, he does well in Albanian too, for example he can read and [. . .]

Concerning their contact with the school, they believe that they do communicate adequately with the school, taking into account their long working hours, their language and communicate needs, family obligations, and feelings of embarrassment (Gkaintartzi 2012). Moreover, their attitudes toward the Greek school seem to be affected by their school experiences from the Albanian school, which was more "strict" and not open to communication, since it emerges that they do want to "interfere" with the teachers' work at school and thus restrict their role mostly to supporting their children in the home context. Parental involvement appears thus to be culturally oriented and conceived of through different perspectives, experiences, and values.

On the other hand, teachers tend to attribute the children's school difficulties to the use of the heritage language at home and hold immigrant parents responsible for showing lack of interest in their children's academic development and inclusion through their language use patterns in the family context (Gkaintartzi 2012). For them, home-school communication depends mostly on the active interest shown by immigrant parents to maintain a frequent contact with them, while communication skills in the Greek language emerge as a basic factor, upon which they evaluate parents' willingness to assimilate and as a result participate in home-school cooperation (Gkaintartzi 2012). As the school teacher points out in the following extract:

## Interview Excerpt

This father speaks Greek very well and his vocabulary, I heard him speak; he also used difficult words, which I have never heard before from Albanians. This father is very good [...] while in the beginning he was hesitant at school, now he seems more comfortable, he came to pick his child up and I saw him[...]But why don't they come to school? To work with the teacher? To be closer? Why do they not care?

It appears that if home-school communication is constructed only through the Greek language, the legitimate language of the school, immigrant parents are by that very fact placed in “weaker,” “deficit” positions and home-school power relations control their communication. In other words, the linguistic and cultural capital of immigrant parents is interpreted and treated by school teachers as “deficit” (Auerbach 1993), and therefore, access to the children's education is determined upon the legitimacy of one and only capital. Thus, home-school communication is based on “hegemonic,” unequal, and unilateral communication, which contributes to the disempowerment of immigrant families (Gkaintartzi et al. 2012).

From the above overview of research data concerning immigrant parents-school communication in the Greek context, it is evident that most studies have investigated this issue from the teachers' perspectives, while studies on immigrant parents' views and perceptions of their involvement and cooperation with the school are limited (Gkaintartzi 2012; Chatzidaki 2007). The research presented in the following section (ELMEGO) includes data from immigrant parents and teachers in order to study the issue of parents-school communication from both perspectives and provide a more complete view of the data.

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## The Project ELMEGO

ELMEGO is an acronym for Greek for Immigrant Parents and it was a research program funded by the Research Committee of the University of Thessaly. It was carried out throughout the years 2011–2012. The subject of this project was to plan and implement specialized courses of Greek language for immigrant parents with children attending compulsory education. The main objective was to facilitate immigrant parents' communication with teachers and schools, attended by their children, with the overarching aim to facilitate linguistic, school, and social integration of immigrants in Greek society. It was a project undertaken in a particularly sensitive context of financial and social crisis in Greece, during which negative and even racist reactions had been brought about. The project “had been conceived as a combination of social solidarity and cutting-edge research on second language teaching and learning” (Androulakis 2013). It was awarded the European Language Label for 2012.

The courses were based on the needs analysis of the target group and the material was developed for the purposes of the project. Concerning the research methodology, the project was team based and grounded within the community (Wei 2012). A qualitative approach was adopted, which involved open (unstructured) and semi-

structured interviews, individual (3) and group (4) interviews, focus groups (8) with prospective students and teachers, ethnographic observation of the courses and written reports from teachers, mediators, and researchers.

## **ELMEGO Findings**

### **Immigrant Parents' Perspectives of Home-School Communication**

The ELMEGO findings confirm that immigrant parents consider their communication with the school as satisfactory, in contrast to teachers and state their involvement in their children's education. In general, they perceive the concept of home-school communication as receiving information from the teachers about their children's progress. Despite their investment in their children's education and school progress, home-school communication is not ranked very high by immigrant parents among their communication needs in the Greek language, compared to other language domains. This is interpreted by the researchers on the basis of several factors, which relate to their low self-esteem and sense of insecurity due to their status, their devaluation from the school and social context, their needs' prioritization, and their culturally oriented perceptions of home-school communication.

It seems that their culturally defined perception of home-school cooperation is driven by their past experiences and beliefs concerning the Albanian school system and rests on their absolute acceptance of and trust in the teachers' and schools' role, as shown in other research data as well (Chatzidaki 2007; Gkaintartzi 2012). There are, however, some parents who do express their willingness for a more qualitative and multifaceted communication with the school, for which they would like advice and guidance from the school.

The most important difficulties reported concern home-school communication in the written form, which functions through school notes and documents in Greek, sent to immigrant parents in order to inform, require their approval and signature, etc. Such mode of communication demands specific literacy skills, and apart from creating practical communication problems, it has also multidimensional aspects, since it appears to contribute to their sense of low self-esteem and negative self-image and consequently to their further disempowerment. As shown in the following extract coming from an Albanian mother below:

### **Interview Excerpt**

[...] the teacher so as not to say: "Oh! Her mother is Albanian and does not know how to write" and my daughter not to feel . . . devaluated

The main dimension of their involvement, as articulated by them, is helping their children with their homework, while they also express their difficulties, feelings of agony, low self-confidence, and conflicts, a finding which is confirmed by other data

too (Gkaintartzi 2012). What is interesting though is that they do not communicate their difficulties to the school teachers, since their contact is restricted only to receiving information about their children's school performance. It thus becomes evident that home-school "dialogue" is mainly constructed on a hegemonic, unequal "monologue," controlled by the school, which "silences" the voices of immigrant parents (Delpit 1988, *Silenced Dialogue*) and defines all terms and access to communication (Gkaintartzi et al. 2012). This "silence" of immigrant parents is interpreted by the researchers as a conscious choice of their own, driven by their language difficulties in expressing their thoughts efficiently and discussing in depth with teachers, as well as by their feelings of embarrassment and their devaluation from the school context. Their "silence" relates to their "invisibility" (Gkaintartzi et al. 2016) since, among other, immigrant parents report that they do not participate in activities organized by parent-teachers associations. This is how an Albanian background mother describes her verbal communication with the teacher at school:

### Interview Excerpt

You collapse psychologically! You feel nothing! You stand there for five – ten minutes and you feel like "when is this conversation going to end to get out of here!"

It could, however, be argued that this "silence" is not a choice from the part of immigrant parents but rather a position imposed on them by the "hegemonic," "violent" communication (Bourdieu et al. 1999), as it is constructed between the school and the parents, which deprives them of their "voices," makes them "invisible," and consequently leads to their disempowerment.

### Teachers' Perspectives of Home-School Communication

Concerning Greek state school teachers' perceptions of home-school communication, the ELMEGO research data confirm that they report the lack of interest and distance shown by immigrant parents. The attitudes of *these uptight people*, as characterized by a teacher of the research sample, are attributed, among other things, to their low social and educational status. However, a very enlightening finding is that the issue of home-school communication emerges as a rather vague and unclear procedure for them, perceiving it almost exclusively from the scope of their own needs and expectations. It seems that they conceive of home-school communication as having specific boundaries – drawn by the school – which cannot be transcended by parents, otherwise it is considered as intervening with their work. Home-school communication is thus restricted to the acceptance of the school priorities and rules, without interfering with the teachers' work, while most responsibilities and demands are stated from the part of the parents. As a teacher explains:

**Interview Excerpt** Communication should be 'everyday', it should be pursued by the parent and not constitute only a response to the teacher's call, it should be characterized by respect and not to intervene with the educational work.

Therefore, contradictorily, they express their satisfaction with their communication with immigrant parents, not because they do communicate qualitatively with them but rather because in fact immigrant parents cannot adequately express their thoughts and voices. Their perceptions of communication with immigrant parents are affected by their role and position of power held in the school context. It is effective if immigrant parents respond “appropriately” linguistically, culturally, and educationally, and therefore, their involvement is interpreted from a dominant view, which requires from parents passive acceptance, “respect” and assimilation to the Greek norm. It is evident that home-school communication in the case of immigrant parents has broader socio-political dimensions, and it is a highly ideological issue, echoing dominant language ideologies and hegemonic power-relations among them (Blackledge 2001; Gkaintartzi et al. 2012).

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## Greek Educational Policies Regarding Heritage Languages

Migration has altered the economic, social, and educational landscape of Greece, since the early 1990s, when the first flows of immigration started. The Greek state has tried to be oriented towards the directions of the European Commission concerning the language teaching-learning and educational inclusion of immigrant background children so as to promote diversity and multiculturalism. In order to respond to the new challenges created by the presence of a large number of immigrant students in Greek schools, the first official decision for the Greek educational system was taken in the early 1980s, with the law 1404/198, which provided for Reception and Support (or Tutorial) classes in mainstream schools, where Greek was taught as a second language. However, these classes were mainly oriented towards the linguistic assimilation of immigrant background students, focusing on the intensive teaching of the Greek language regardless of their linguistic and cultural background (Damanakis 1997; Dimakos and Tasiopoulou 2003).

Several years later, Law 2413/96 “Greek Education Abroad, Intercultural Education and Other Provisions,” originated by the change of the socio-political landscape and the increasing migration flow, came to fill in the gap. Among other regulations, this law led to the establishment of 26 “intercultural schools” throughout the country. The aim of this measure was to cover the language and communication needs of pupils, who have a mother tongue other than Greek (first and second generation immigrants) and *provide education to young people with a specific educational, social or cultural identity* (the Ministry’s translation). One of the requirements was that 45% of the student population consists of “foreign” students. Despite promising special curricula and provisions, this legislation led to the unsuccessful linguistic and cultural integration of non-Greek background students (Mitakidou et al. 2007). The intercultural educational policy aimed at “particular” – ethnic minority – students and their learning needs, while it did not consider the sensitization of the total student population towards diversity (Damanakis 1997).



Foreign and immigrant background students were isolated as “special” students in “special” schools and their “otherness” was legitimized by policy (Damanakis 1997).

Connecting mainstream state schools, educational provisions for immigrant children included mainly the teaching of Greek as a second language in Reception or Support classes (Dimakos and Tasiopoulou 2003; Mitakidou et al. 2007). Concerning the teaching of heritage languages, the ministry of education issued a decision Φ1/22/Γ1/720 (14/9/99), which included more active measures regarding students with immigrant origin. This ministerial decision, recognizing the importance of linguistic diversity and multilingualism, provided for the establishment of classes, where immigrant pupils could be taught the language and culture of their country of origin as part of their school curriculum. Specifically it is stated that: *“lessons for the language and culture of the children’s country of origin are optional and classes may be established in schools on condition that there is a sufficient number of pupils (i.e., 7–15 pupils)”* (Gkaintartzi et al. 2014b, p. 3). Unfortunately, however, this measure has hardly been implemented in the state school practice (Kiliari 2005). So far, the authorities have claimed that the reason for not introducing such a measure is the lack of interest shown by immigrant parents since immigrant parents do not want their children to attend mother tongue classes for fear that this may interfere with their children’s effort to acquire Greek (Mitakidou et al. 2007; Gkaintartzi et al. 2016). Moreover, according to research data, Greek teachers tend to advise parents to speak only Greek at home in order not to “confuse” the child (Gogonas 2007; Mitakidou and Daniilidou 2007; Skourtou 2002).

Migrant languages are still excluded from the state school curriculum and the prevailing perception in the official discourse on the maintenance of heritage languages pertains to a human right, which does not concern the Greek school, transferring thus the responsibility of teaching and learning their languages to the immigrant groups themselves (Gkaintartzi et al. 2016; Kiliari 2005). All in all, measures taken by the Ministry of Education to address immigrant students’ educational needs concern exclusively reception and support classes in the Greek language, while there is no “space” for heritage languages teaching-learning, even though these languages concern a large number of immigrant pupils like those of Albanian origin. Concerning heritage language teaching, complementary schools (i.e., schools providing heritage language courses) have begun to function. These are mainly supported by immigrant associations and communities in Greece, without receiving any official recognition by the Greek Ministry of Education (Maligkoudi 2009, p. 298). The first complementary schools were established by the Albanian immigrant communities and focus on teaching the heritage languages and organizing activities for covering their social and cultural needs. However, the number of “complementary” schools organized by local Albanian communities is still quite disproportionately small and participation rates in such classes are quite low (Gkaintartzi et al. 2014a).

Furthermore, some studies (Gogonas 2007, 2009, 2010) discuss that the lack of institutional support for teaching-learning heritage languages in Greek schools, in connection with the stigmatization it has received in Greek society, has led to the “abandonment” of the heritage language (Gogonas and Michail 2014). In contrast,

the foreign languages offered in general education are three: English (obligatory), German, and French (obligatory by choice), indirectly reproducing the language hierarchies maintained in EU (Dendrinou and Mitsikopoulou 2004) and reinforcing the abandonment of heritage languages. It can be concluded that the Greek state has not provided for policies that could inspire an intercultural approach and a critical linguistic and cultural awareness and as a result immigrant pupils' languages remain "invisible" in education (Gkaintartzi and Tsokalidou 2011; Tsokalidou 2005). All in all, the Greek educational system has been criticized for promoting ethnocentrism and conformity with monolingual norms (Frangoudaki and Dragonas 1997; Katsikas and Politou 1999).

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## **Review of Sociolinguistic Studies Concerning the Issue of Albanian as Heritage Language in Greece**

### **Greek Teachers' Attitudes and Practices Towards the Albanian as a Heritage Language in Greece**

Research on Greek teachers' views towards the bilingualism of immigrant pupils in their classrooms has shown that they mostly focus on their school learning difficulties as well as on integration problems they may face (Skourtou et al. 2004; Skourtou 2002; UNICEF 2001; Bombay 1996). Especially, at the beginning of the influx of immigrant pupils in Greek state schools, the majority of teachers reported feeling unprepared to deal with issues of diversity in their classrooms and stated their need for further training (Skourtou et al. 2004; Skourtou 2002). Research data have shown that despite the teachers' progressively positive attitudes towards their students' bilingualism in general, they are still not aware of its' benefits for their school language learning and academic development and thus do not relate it to the school language process (Skourtou et al. 2004; Skourtou 2002). Their views reveal the orientation towards languages as a problem, mainly regarding school language learning (Ruiz 1984).

According to several studies (Gogonas 2007; Mitakidou and Daniilidou 2007; Kasimi 2005; Skourtou 2002), Greek teachers tend to advise immigrant parents to speak only Greek at home, since they consider their heritage languages as an obstacle to school language learning, which hinders second-language development, especially when referring to low-prestige languages such as Albanian in the Greek context (Gkaintartzi et al. 2014b). Recent research data have shown that Greek teachers are still hesitant about incorporating the "theory" into their classroom practices, despite their professional developmental experience and their positive attitudes towards bilingualism in its general sense (Skourtou 2008). It seems that as far as school learning is concerned, they hold quite fixed views about their pupils' heritage languages as an obstacle. This also implies the importance of their language ideologies, which according to research data (Gkaintartzi et al. 2014b) seem to reflect the legitimization of the Greek language as the "one language for all" in the

school context and the exclusion of the children's heritage languages from everyday school practices.

Concerning the issue of the further development of heritage languages and their inclusion into the state school curriculum, teachers reveal contradictory stances and a degree of ambivalence (Mitakidou and Daniilidou 2007). As a result, it still remains a highly debated issue. According to most recent research data from a nationwide questionnaire survey on Greek state school teachers' views towards their students' heritage languages and their inclusion into the official curriculum, a considerable number of them (48.2%) still believe that heritage languages hinder school language learning (i.e., Greek) (Gkaintartzi et al. 2014b). Another large number stated that the learning of heritage languages should concern the immigrant communities themselves (52.5%). Concerning the issue of teaching the heritage languages in the Greek state school, about half of the teachers (54.8%) responded in a positive way but the overwhelming majority of them (79.2%) stated that such classes should take place after the regular daily school schedule. Their controversies can be understood by studying their language ideologies, which reflect the legitimization of the Greek language as the only school language within the Greek school timetable (Gkaintartzi et al. 2014b). Qualitative data on teachers' discourse reveal that their seemingly "neutral" language attitudes, expressed through "indifferent" stances, actually promote the exclusion of the children's heritage languages from the "normal" school timetable. Teachers seem to be "trapped" into this "neutrality" towards the children's heritage languages, driven mostly by the underpinning ideology of monolingualism, which nevertheless remains highly "invisible" to them.

### **Immigrant Parents' Attitudes and Practices Towards the Albanian as a Heritage Language in Greece**

Sociolinguistic research into language attitudes and practices of immigrant groups in Greece has developed rather recently, focusing mostly on Albanian immigrant families, as they constitute the largest ethnic group. Most of these studies indicate tendencies of language shift among the second generation of Albanians in Greece (Chatzidaki 2005; Chatzidaki and Xenikaki 2012; Gogonas 2009, 2010; Maligkoudi 2010; Michail 2008a, b, 2010; Tsokalidou 2005). A common finding in such studies (Gkaintartzi et al. 2014a) is that second-generation speakers of Albanian origin demonstrate higher competence in Greek in comparison to Albanian and a preference for the majority language, especially when communicating among siblings and peers (even of the same background), something that could point to the direction of language shift. Albanian immigrant families tend to restrict the use of the heritage language, to a large extent, to the domain of the "home," while the Greek language dominates in all public domains (Gkaintartzi 2012).

A basic factor for this language shift documented by some studies (Gogonas 2007, 2009, 2010; Michail 2010) is the stigmatization of the Albanian language within the Greek society and the lack of institutional support for teaching Albanian

in Greek schools, despite the large number of Albanian origin pupils (Gogonas and Michail 2014). Moreover, research data also demonstrate young and adult Albanian immigrants' own low perceptions of ethnolinguistic vitality and integrative attitude (Gogonas and Michail 2014). At the same time, regarding family policies, research reports that Albanian parents do not apply systematic policies to support Albanian language maintenance (Chatzidaki and Maligkoudi 2013). Although Albanian immigrant parents express positive attitudes towards language maintenance and the further development of the heritage language, they do not engage in specific, systematic language management practices, revealing a degree of ambivalence towards the support of the Albanian language (Chatzidaki and Maligkoudi 2013). Research data attest to their high investment into the Greek language, as a vehicle to the educational, professional, and social development of their children, while their anxiety for language maintenance is often articulated through dilemmas, conflicts, and controversies (Gkaintartzi 2012).

All in all, most sociolinguistic research data among Albanian families in Greece document immigrant parents' positive attitudes towards language maintenance and further attest to their desire for heritage language education, showing however the ambivalences and multiple ideological stances, through which they voice this desire. Research findings suggest that Albanian immigrant families in Greece do not present a uniform picture with regard to language maintenance but vary as to the degree they commit themselves to it, which can be further understood by studying their language ideologies (Gkaintartzi et al. 2014a). Such research data attest to the ideological conflicts, expressed through their discourse concerning the inclusion of the heritage language into Greek state school curriculum (Gkaintartzi et al. 2014a).

Drawing from a nationwide quantitative study on immigrant parents' perspectives about heritage language maintenance and education in Greek state schools, the overwhelming majority of Albanian immigrant parents (88.3%) report that they would like their heritage language to be taught in the state schools attended by their children (Gkaintartzi et al. 2016). They seem to believe that in this way the Greek state school would fulfill its responsibility towards them, while the inclusion of the heritage language in the state school curriculum would also strengthen the social status of the language (*ibid*). Among the main reasons for the support of heritage languages reported is the symbolic link of the home language to the country of origin as a core value of their identities, the need to maintain bonds with their relatives in the homeland as well as the usability of the language in their future, which could be interpreted regarding the possibility of repatriation in times of economic crisis in Greece. The synthesis of the quantitative data with qualitative data on their language ideologies shows that immigrant parents are becoming increasingly conscious of the need for heritage language maintenance and education and desire a "space" in the Greek state school curriculum, articulating however multiple ideological "voices" ranging from resistant, counter hegemonic to in-between and conciliatory (Gkaintartzi et al. 2016). Namely, the issue of whether heritage language classes should be included within the regular morning timetable of the state school or "outside" it appears to be a matter of ideological conflict,

reflecting their ambivalence regarding their rights and demands from the Greek state (Gkaintartzi et al. 2016). All in all, Albanian immigrant parents “voices” support heritage language education and have come to realize the benefits of bilingualism and its further development for their children.

### **Immigrant Background Students' Attitudes and Practices Towards the Albanian as a Heritage Language in Greece**

Research in immigrant background children's language views and practices is rather scarce in Greece. There are only very few studies which have investigated their sociolinguistics experiences and perspectives through their own “voices,” since they have mostly been studied through the adults' (parents' and teachers') scope (Gkaintartzi 2012). Research data on language maintenance and shift among second generation Albanian immigrants in Greece have indicated that students choose Greek to interact with peers (even of the same background) while they use mostly the heritage language with adults, parents, and relatives (Gogonas 2007). These language patterns are evident in other research data as well (e.g., Chatzidaki 2005; Maligkoudi 2010; Chatzidaki and Xenikaki 2012).

Concerning their language skills, research data have pointed out a considerable dominance of the Greek language over the Albanian among Albanian immigrant especially concerning their literacy skills in the heritage language (Gogonas 2010). Second-generation speakers of Albanian origin demonstrate higher competence in Greek Albanian, which could point to the direction of language shift if other dimensions and factors are not fully studied, such as the broader context of economic crisis in Greece and potential repatriation plans (Gkaintartzi et al. 2014b). Concerning patterns of the language use and choice among Albanian immigrant adolescents, they are reported to still use the heritage language quite frequently, especially when addressing older family members, although they do demonstrate a distinct preference for the use of the majority language (Chatzidaki and Xenikaki 2012). Regarding their ethnolinguistic vitality, research data have shown that Albanian pupils seem to be aware of the stigmatized status of their ethnic group and wish to distance themselves from a stigmatized identity and language (Gogonas 2010). Many of them refrain from using the heritage language in public (Chatzidaki and Maligkoudi 2013; Gogonas 2010; Gogonas and Michail 2014) and in the school context as well (Gkaintartzi 2012).

Drawing from ethnographic data concerning the language views and practices of Albanian immigrant background primary school and preschool children, the children do express the important role the heritage language plays in their lives, as it emerges as an integral part of their everyday realities (Gkaintartzi 2012). They state the need and desire to maintain and further develop the heritage language, stressing its role for communicating with their parents and maintaining bonds with the homeland and their relatives, as well as implying its symbolic connection to their identities. For these children, Albanian is the “private” code of the family and the homeland, which has an important place in their lives, aside the Greek language as the “public” code

and fulfills specific communicative needs and functions, which cannot be satisfied through one language.

According to nationwide quantitative research data on Albanian immigrant background students' language views, who attend primary and secondary Greek state schools, the majority of them states that they do know and use their heritage language in specific domains and with specific interlocutors (Kiliari 2014). They also state their desire to further develop the heritage language and mostly improve literacy skills, referring to three basic factors, which are (a) its symbolic value and relation to their country, (b) its role for communicating with relatives and co-ethnic friends, and (c) its instrumental value for the future. The last reason could be related to the possibility of repatriation, which is strengthened in times of economic crisis in Greece. Concerning the teaching of heritage language in the Greek state school, the research data reveal quite ambivalent and contradictory stances, since about half of them (56.1%) wish to learn Albanian at school while a considerable number do not relate its teaching to the regular Greek state school timetable (43.9%). This ambivalence can be interpreted by studying the interaction of broader language ideologies and discourses, which are reproduced through the social, school, and home context. Immigrant children do receive direct and indirect messages concerning the language power relations and the value of languages through the broader and the school context and formulate "embryonic" ideological discourses (Gkaintartzi 2012), affected by family and school language ideologies. Research data indicate the conflicts and dilemmas the children experience in the intersection of the school monolingual ideology and their parents' ambivalent, "in-between" language ideologies (Gkaintartzi et al. 2014b) concerning language hierarchies in the Greek school.

According to research data on immigrant students' discourses in written essay texts (Archakis 2014), they attempt to integrate into the majority culture, by embracing dominant Greek social values but on the other hand wish to maintain their cultural identity, by building their sense of cultural pride. Consequently, they appear to construct broader identities, which include their relation to both the countries, the homeland and the host country, wishing to keep a bond with their past while adjusting in the new country (Papandreu 2013; Archakis 2014). Immigrant students seem to value their languages and countries in different ways, constructing multiple and complex identities and striving for more spaces of "translanguaging" in their sociolinguistic realities.

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## Conclusion

The above overview of research data concerning Albanian immigrant parents-school communication in Greece attempted to discuss multiple dimensions of the issue, as they have been highlighted by sociolinguistic studies in the Greek context. It is evident that home-school communication is a culturally oriented concept and a complex, multifaceted issue conceived of in different ways by teachers and parents. Immigrant parents' involvement into their children's education is shown to function under power-relations maintained and controlled by the Greek school, while aspects of language hierarchies and "legitimacy" of a specific linguistic and cultural capital restrict their

access and lead to their further disempowerment and “invisibility.” Home-school communication is constructed from the dominant view as a “monologue,” a passive, one-way, and receptive process, in which immigrant parents ought to participate in, without having the right or the appropriate capital to express their voices. On the other hand, immigrant parents seem to participate in their children’s education in the ways in which firstly they conceive of it and secondly they can while being aware of their weaker status in the school context. They are “silenced” through existing school language attitudes and practices concerning home-school communication, as it appears that teachers of the dominant group determine what they should communicate, in which language, and how, without listening to them. Moreover, research in Greece needs to focus to a greater extent to their own “voices” and needs in order to empower them in their communication with the school and in their integration process into the Greek society. More critical, inclusive approaches are needed not only in pedagogy but also from research so as to “listen” to their needs, “see” their capital, and empower their role in their children’s education and as an extension in the Greek social context.

The second part of the paper presented a review of data concerning the issue of Albanian heritage language in the Greek context from the perspectives of immigrant parents, teachers, and students as well as through educational policies. The lack of “space” for heritage languages in the Greek state school emerges as a highly ideological issue, related to the devaluation of the Albanian language and the dominance of monolingualism in education and society. Immigrant parents’ and students’ needs, capitals, and voices need to be heard in home-school communication – starting from top-down approaches – as well as in educational policies and research so as to move towards more equal and cooperative relations and a more inclusive, culturally responsive education for immigrant background students. The future of the Albanian as a heritage language in Greece is affected by multiple factors: socio-political, economic, educational, and ideological, and heritage language education in the Greek school can constitute a powerful, positive step towards the empowerment of immigrant students, parents, and communities.

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## Cross-References

- ▶ [Heritage Language Education in Germany: A Focus on Turkish and Russian from Primary to Higher Education](#)
- ▶ [Preserving Heritage Languages Through Schooling in India](#)
- ▶ [Strengthening Linguistic Bridges Between Home and School: Experiences of Immigrant Children and Parents in Iceland](#)

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