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ICTs and language teaching: the missing third circle

Περίληψη (abstract)

Συμπληρώνονται ήδη περισσότερο από σαράντα χρόνια από τις πρώτες απόπειρες για αξιοποίηση των υπολογιστών στη γλωσσική διδασκαλία. Τα χρόνια αυτά είναι τόσο πλούσια σε επιστημονικό προβληματισμό και ποικιλία απόψεων, ώστε δικαίως να δημιουργείται σύγχυση ως προς το τι πράγματι νέο έχει εντωμεταξύ προκύψει και να υπάρχει ιδιαίτερη δυσκολία στην ομαδοποίηση των απόψεων αυτών και, κυρίως, εντοπισμού των κενών που προκύπτουν. Στόχος του παρόντος κειμένου είναι να επιχειρήσει μια ταξινόμηση των ως τώρα αναζητήσεων και κυρίως να εστιάσει σε τομείς που έχουν διερευνηθεί ελάχιστα ή καθόλου. Προκειμένου να γίνει αυτό σαφές χρησιμοποιείται η μεταφορά των τριών ομόκεντρων και συγκοινωνούντων μεταξύ τους κύκλων.

Στον εσωτερικό πρώτο κύκλο τοποθετούνται οι αναζητήσεις που στρέφουν το ενδιαφέρον τους στον υπολογιστή ως ένα μέσο που θα συνεισφέρει στην καλύτερη διδασκαλία των γλωσσών. Πρόκειται για τις παλιότερες χρονικά συζητήσεις με ιδιαίτερη διάδοση και στις μέρες μας. Στο δεύτερο κύκλο τοποθετούνται οι αναζητήσεις που αντιμετωπίζουν τις Τεχνολογίες της Πληροφορίας και Επικοινωνίας (ΤΠΕ) ως μέσα πρακτικής γραμματισμού και αναζητούν το νέο που προκύπτει στην επικοινωνία, και επομένως στο περιεχόμενο της γλωσσικής διδασκαλίας, μετά από την ευρεία διάδοση των ψηφιακών μέσων. Ο προβληματισμός αυτός εστιάζει κυρίως το ενδιαφέρον του στις μεταβολές που έχουν προκύψει στο τρίγωνο συγγραφέας – κείμενο – αναγνώστης και τις συνέπειες που έχουν στη διδασκαλία των γλωσσών. Πρότασή μου είναι το περιεχόμενο των δύο κύκλων να συνεξετάζεται, να αντιμετωπίζονται δηλαδή τα νέα μέσα παράλληλα, τόσο ως μέσα πρακτικής γραμματισμού όσο και ως μέσα διδασκαλίας, αξιοποιώντας δημιουργικά και τις δύο παραδόσεις.

Μετά από σύντομη συζήτηση του περιεχομένου των δύο αυτών κύκλων, η εστίαση μεταφέρεται στην ανάδειξη ενός τρίτου κύκλου –ο οποίος αποτελεί το πλαίσιο για την καλύτερη ανάγνωση των άλλων δύο– για τον προσδιορισμό του περιεχομένου του οποίου έχει επιδειχθεί πολύ μικρό ενδιαφέρον. Οι τομείς που συζητούνται είναι ενδεικτικοί, προκειμένου να αναδειχθεί η λογική και όχι να εξαντληθεί ένα τόσο σύνθετο ζήτημα. Υποστηρίζεται ότι οι περισσότερες από τις επιστημονικές συζητήσεις σήμερα, κινούμενες στο πλαίσιο των δύο εσωτερικών κύκλων, υπερτονίζουν το ρόλο, τη δύναμη και τις ιδιαιτερότητες του μέσου, υποβαθμίζοντας ποικίλες διαστάσεις που έχουν σχέση με την ιδιαιτερότητα των γλωσσών και την τοπική πολιτισμική παράδοση. Παράλληλα, εστιάζοντας στο «εδώ και τώρα» της διδασκαλίας, «θαμπώνονται» από τη λάμψη της εκάστοτε νέας τεχνολογικής δυνατότητας και αδυνατούν να εντάξουν τις εξελίξεις σε ένα σαφές ιστορικό πλαίσιο.

Η έμφαση στην ιδιαιτερότητα της κάθε γλώσσας και κυρίως στο ιστορικό όλο είναι ο εξωτερικός τρίτος κύκλος που προτείνεται ως πλαίσιο, προκειμένου να διαβάζεται με μεγαλύτερη επιστημονική ψυχραιμία το περιεχόμενο των άλλων δύο. Είναι η κατεύθυνση που ταιριάζει περισσότερο στην ακαδημαϊκή ευρωπαϊκή παράδοση και μπορεί να αποτελέσει το πλαίσιο για χάραξη ευρωπαϊκής πολιτικής σε ένα τόσο σημαντικό ζήτημα, όπως αυτό της αξιοποίησης των ΤΠΕ στη διδασκαλία των γλωσσών.

1.   Introduction

More than forty years have now passed since the first attempts to use computers in language teaching.[1] These years have been so rich in scientific thinking and wealth of views that confusion has rightly arisen about what actually new has emerged in the meantime,

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[1]   I make no distinction in the present text between L1 and L2 teaching, in an attempt to express thinking common to both scientific fields. The undersigned has been more engaged in the utilization of New Technologies in the teaching of L1, a fact which is probably reflected in the text.

and about how to group these views under discrete categories. This text attempts to classify the research to date and to focus on fields that have been little if at all explored. In order to make this clear, I employ the metaphor of three concentric and overlapping[2] circles (see diagram 1).

In the first (inner) circle is the research that regarded ICTs as a means that contributed significantly to better language teaching. This includes earlier discussions which are, however, widespread today. In the second circle is the research that regarded ICTs as literacy practice environments, which is in search of whatever new emerges in communication and, accordingly, in the content and context of language teaching, in the wake of the wide dissemination of digital literacy practice environments. This research focuses primarily on the changes that have resulted in the well known triangle of author – text – reader, and the consequences these changes have for language teaching. Discussion starts with a brief presentation of the contents of these two circles. Then the focus shifts to the emergence of a third circle, which is proposed as a necessary framework for a better reading of the other two, in which very little interest has been shown so far. This text gives particular weight to highlighting and discussing indicative facets of this third circle.

This paper draws on data related to the Greek language, which are consequently of greater concern to the lesser-spoken languages. However, a conscious effort is made to ensure that the discussion is of more general interest and that it is not exhausted by linguistic and local particularities.

2.   The first circle: Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

Initial attempts to use computers in language teaching date back to the 1960s, when the first efforts were made to seek out in computers[3] the ideal intelligent means that could significantly contribute to an improvement in the quality of language teaching as it was then understood. Emphasis was placed on the teaching of grammatical "micro-structures", and especial weight was given to the surface characteristics of the text, e.g. spelling, grammar and assessment (Hawisher et al. 1996). Within this framework, the computer was a patient teacher who offered learners language materials in small sections; it strengthened success with praise, and in the case of failure offered the learners feedback to guide them to an understanding of the problem and choice of the correct response.[4] This view is clearly reflected in the first title attributed to this newly-created field whose subject was language teaching with computers: *Computer Assisted Language Learning* (*CALL*). Within this context, the computer was considered a medium that could significantly aid in the better teaching of both L1 and L2 (Hawisher et al. 1996).

This version of CALL was dramatically enriched during the decades that followed, given also the post-structuralist research in language teaching. Within this framework, computers gradually ceased to be seen as "teaching machines", but as *tools* to facilitate lan-

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[2] This is indicated in diagram 1, with the broken lines of the two inside circles.

[3] At the time, computers were enormous "calculating machines" that few research institutions made use of; personal computers began circulating widely only in the early 1980s.

[4] A well known system of this type, widespread in the U.S. during the sixties and seventies, was PLATO (Programmed Logic for Automatic Teaching Operations), which was used for everything from the teaching of English and Chinese to Mathematics and Biology (Hawisher et al. 1996, 35).

guage teaching. For example, the weight given in the 1980s to the utilization of word processing and Local Area Networks (LANs) is well known (Selfe/Hilligoss 1994), as are the efforts after 1990 to utilize the array of possibilities offered by the internet for synchronous and asynchronous communication, for drawing upon authentic linguistic material, for communicating with native speakers, for distance/e-learning and for making use of multimedia and text corpora.[5] Recently, there has been a great deal of discussion about the possibilities afforded by the various social networking environments (e.g. blogs, Facebook), known as Web 2.0 environments, in language teaching (e.g. Kárpáti 2009; Purdy 2010).

Today we could say that we are in a phase that has been dubbed the "vertical spread of CALL", in the sense that the utilization of digital means and the internet both for learning material as well as teaching is taken for granted (Chapelle 2010). Textbooks, for instance, are accompanied by CD-ROMs that refer to specific pages which support both teacher and learner with further material; in the course of teaching, both the use of the internet for obtaining authentic language material and the use of synchronous and asynchronous web communication are considered a matter of course. As Chapelle (2010, 67) characteristically points out, "In a sense, today almost anyone who is working on materials for classroom language learning is working in CALL".

3.   The 2nd circle: new technologies – new literacies

In the previous section our interest was focused on the utilization of ICTs as pedagogical means in language teaching. However, rapid developments over the course of the last three decades have created many new givens that compel a careful review of the relationship between ICTs and language teaching. One important new given is the wide utilization of ICTs, in parallel with older tools (print, pencil and paper) in every facet of daily life as tools for writing, reading, communicating, and entertainment, i.e. as literacy practice environments. Thus, the computer, from having once been a specialist tool initially employed more in the natural and physical sciences, gradually came to occupy a central place as a communication tool at all levels of daily life (work, entertainment, information, scientific/scholarly work, education, the arts etc.). This has led to the emergence of a "new communicative order" (Street 2000). Defining the features of this "new communicative order" today has become the main concern in the scholarly field under discussion here, since these changes redefine and re-determine the content and the context of language teaching. It would be difficult to discuss all this research in the present text, and for this reason we shall merely touch upon some indicative facets of the issue.

An issue of major interest is the new givens created with the use of ICTs as communication tools on all sides of the well known triangle: author – text – reader. An author can more easily become "authors" from the minute that the co-production of written discourse is much easier, without the spatial/temporal restrictions imposed by traditional communication technology. Also different is the process of writing in digital environments, from the moment that the text becomes fluid and easily-mutable (Hawisher et al. 1996). However, even more innovative is the fact that for the first time we can have texts with a collective (and simultaneously anonymous) origin, e.g. those of Wikipedia.

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[5]   For a general overview of the variety of research within the framework of CALL see Hubbard (2009).

There have also been important changes in the concept of the text as we once knew it only a few decades ago. The distinctive features of ICTs (Kress uses the term "affordances") make it very easy to mingle semiotic modes and simultaneously make achievable the wide dissemination of multimodal texts (combinations of text, image, video, sound, etc.) (e.g. Kress 2003, 2010). The hypertextuality that characterizes (primarily) web texts may also be considered an important special feature (Snyder 1996). Finally, much discussion is also taking place regarding the new language varieties employed in digital environments for synchronous and asynchronous communication (Crystal 2001, 2008).

Within such an environment of wider changes, the reading processes and consequently the type of reader who needs to be cultivated in language teaching cannot remain intact. The multimodality of texts, hypertextuality and the possibility for information retrieval from enormous (language and multimodal) databases demand other types of knowledge and reading skills. We should not underestimate the wide dissemination of e-books, as well as new generation mobile phones through which it is now possible for someone to be "always on" line (Baron 2008). The wide dissemination of onscreen reading is not simply a different practice; it forms a significant new given that today's curricula for language teaching cannot ignore (see also 4.3.1).

At the same time, but also in connection with the changes in the triangle "author – text – reader", we should also point out the significant changes that we have in children's socialization. There is intense scholarly concern growing today in relation to the fact that the internet and the various Web 2.0 environments structure alternative spaces for social and, consequently, discourse participation. The lively participation by young people in these environments is connected with the various and often different identities they have the opportunity to realize.[6] Everybody (especially marginalized groups, e.g. immigrants) has the opportunity to find a "place at the table", express themselves and engage in a dialogue with a global audience (Koutsogiannis/Mitsikopoulou 2004). Within this framework, the strict limits on the use of languages that were defined by national borders are removed, creating new givens in linguistic socialization and trans-regional communication (e.g. Lam 2009).

Clearly, this new reality could not but be expressed in new theories about language teaching. Terms such as *multiliteracies*, *multimodality*, and *design* belong to this new strand of research; they are widely-employed and express the new orientations language teaching acquires in the light of the widespread use of ICTs as literacy practice environments (see Cope/Kalantzis 2000).

This brief review actually reveals that CALL's classical focus on the utilization of ICTs as pedagogical tools in language teaching (see the first circle, diagram 1) is insufficient, and that what we consider to be the content and context of language teaching needs to be dramatically redefined. Some of the new attempts to utilize every new environment (e.g. Web 2.0 environments) in the teaching of languages (see section 2) are of considerable interest, but in my opinion they remain insufficient. Efforts to create digital language infrastructures (dictionaries, text corpora, speech technology etc.) are also very necessary, since they significantly facilitate modern communication, but they are not enough,

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[6] For a critical discussion of the related literature see Koutsogiannis (2007, 2011).

either. A more comprehensive redefinition of the goals, content, and teaching practices in language teaching is necessary, rather than the simple utilization of ICTs as teaching environments and the development of digital linguistic infrastructures. But for that to happen, we need a broader discussion of issues involving communication and literacy from a new communicative perspective.

We know from our experience to date with other literacy practice environments like that of print that when literacy's content and context change, this is connected with broader changes of a historical nature and not simply with the invention of some new technology. For example, changes in how literacy began to be approached in schools during the 19th and 20th centuries were not merely connected with the fact that print technology was being employed, but also with the fact that wider economic and political changes were taking place at the time (Collins/Blot 2003; Anderson 1991). I shall consider indicative directions for such a more comprehensive redefinition below.
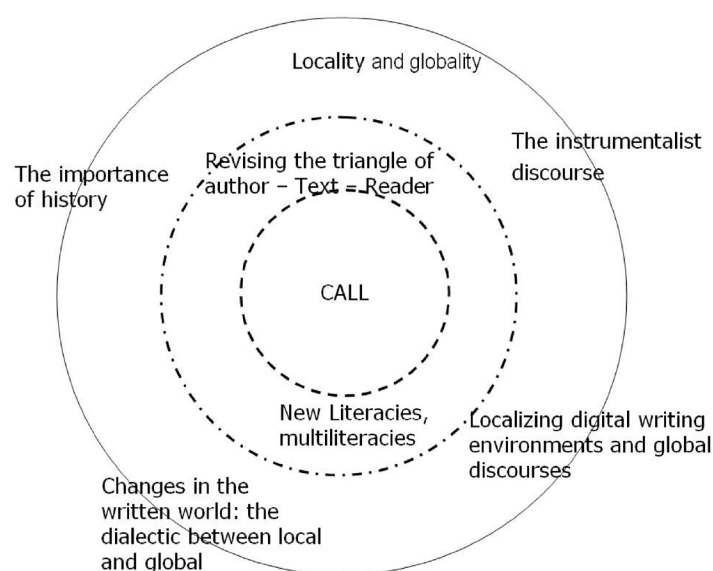
Diagram 1: The "three circles" metaphor

4.   The third circle

The issues briefly discussed above as the contents of the second circle, which as we saw significantly redefined the contents of the first circle, are an important aspect of current scholarly investigation. However, since most discussion focuses on the English language, it is important that thinking about this topic be enriched by contributions from other linguistic and cultural viewpoints. Accordingly, one important priority that should be highlighted is *locality*. With this as a starting-point, in what follows I will place emphasis on the emergence of questions connected with the lesser-used languages such as Greek, because in this way we can better comprehend the complexity of everything touched upon in the previous two sections. However, discussion about communication and language teaching on purely local or cultural terms does not entirely illuminate all their dimensions; for this reason, I shall also attempt to highlight a number of common variables of a historical nature with different local versions. It is obvious that such complex issues cannot be exhausted within the confines of the present text. Here I will simply indicate a direction through the use of suggestive examples.

4.1 Locality and globality

4.1.1 Instrumentalist discourse

Focusing on the history of the scholarly field under discussion here, we notice that (almost) every five years there has been a shift to a new digital environment which was attributed unique qualities to improve language teaching. Shortly afterwards it was abandoned for a new digital environment and was hardly discussed thereafter.

It is indicative that in 1989, in the midst of the scholarly community's enthusiasm for the possibilities of *hypertext* in language teaching, Meyrowitz, to deride the exaggerated claims that were being spoken and written, gave the following title to a lecture he delivered at a conference:[7] "Hypertext – Does it Reduce Cholesterol, Too?" (see Meyrowitz 1991). The same ironic question could be posed multiple times in the history of the field under study, altering nothing other than the subject in this question. In the beginning there were *drills and practice* which could deservedly assume this position; then came *Local Area Networks*, followed by *Multimedia* and, during recent years, the internet's turn has arrived, with all its famous individual applications (World Wide Web, E-mail, synchronous and asynchronous communication, Web 2.0, etc.).

Exclusive focus on the possibilities afforded by technology (= the instrument), and its isolation from other important variables (financial, cultural, social, historical, human identities) form the core of what I have termed *instrumentalist discourse* (Koutsogiannis 2009, 2011). I believe that such discourse has negative consequences for the utilization of ICTs in language teaching, because it assigns exclusive emphasis to technology, underestimating the fact that a change in teaching practices is an exceedingly difficult matter (Lewis/ Fabos 2008) and one dependent on many other variables (Snyder/Bulfin 2008).

Excessive emphasis on the power of technology and the devaluation of other complex social parameters has deep roots in the U.S., according to Selfe/Hawisher (2004), but spread very quickly to Europe too, at least in relation to ICTs in teaching and education. A common facet in instrumentalist discourse is its particular emphasis on recording progress on the basis of statistics: ratio of children to computers in schools, percentage of computers online, number of educators using ICTs, number of software programs used in language teaching, etc. This was a fairly widespread practice in the European Union. All these led to hasty and makeshift actions, which at heart leave intact the root of the problems, which for the most part are not resolved by an improvement in superficial statistics.

The negative consequences of instrumentalist discourse have been pointed out in the international scholarship (Cuban 2000; Selwyn 2010). However, it appears that these are more pronounced for the lesser-used languages and less-developed countries, because they oversimplify complex issues, leading to the waste of financial resources that are in any case limited (Koutsogiannis 2011).

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[7]   Pittsburgh, PA, 5-8 November 1989.

4.1.2 Localizing digital writing environments and global discourses

Something important that has not been discussed to date is the fact that modern electronic environments for discourse production are not blank white pages on which we are invited to compose our text on the basis of each (specific) communicative event. They are accompanied by libraries of semiotic resources and guides for text composition (viz. word processing), which may influence to a greater or lesser degree the direction taken by the written discourse produced.

Careful study of the best known word processing environments like *Word* and *Power-Point* (Microsoft), both of which are Hellenized, shows that this Hellenization is superficial and accomplished – to the degree it is accomplished at all – only at the level of user interface. Below we discuss indicatively the most-used environment for digital writing, the word processing program *Microsoft Word for Windows*. The first possibility provided, through the choice of *Δημιουργία* (Create) (in the section *Αρχείο* (File) in the older versions) is that of selecting a "model" text type to support the process of writing that will follow. In every edition of the Greek version of Microsoft *Word*, many templates are provided (e.g. letters, calendars, greeting cards, invitations, job descriptions/ announcements, reminders, references, CVs), all of which form a faithful word-for-word transfer from the corresponding English "templates", drawing nothing from Greek textual reality. The "templates", however, are not confined to the specific ones that accompany *Word*; by selecting *επιπλέον πρότυπα* ("additional templates"), the Greek user is redirected to Microsoft's own page, which offers a great wealth and variety of English text "templates", leaving almost no field of literacy practice uncovered. For the most part, the same holds true for Microsoft *PowerPoint*, whose available semiotic resources are likewise a literal translation from English.

On the basis of these remarks, we could say that we find ourselves in the presence of significant new givens. Until now, we have known that texts – all forms of texts – are available social semiotic resources (Cope/Kalantzis 2000), created in close conjunction with the particular social and cultural characteristics of every society. As has been aptly pointed out, "genres are not just forms. Genres are forms of life, ways of being. They are frames of social action. They are environments of learning" (Bazerman 1997, 19). If we understand genres within such a framework as "ways of being", then this means that the new environments for the production of written discourse are proposing via templates "forms of life" and "frames for social action" that have no connection with Greek reality. Thus, the digital environments for the production of written discourse that are advertised in the bibliography as the *par excellence* means, favouring experimentation and creativity during writing (Hawisher et al. 1996), are also shown in the light of more careful investigation to be promoting "guided imitation" for lesser-used languages like Greek.

The fact is that as literacy practice environments, ICTs are not neutral; rather, they embody beliefs connected with the socio-cultural environment in which they were created, clearly creating new challenges and givens for the lesser-used languages and their teaching. These new givens lead us to see everything that has been claimed within the framework of the first and second circles from a different perspective (see Koutsogiannis 2004).

Up until this point, I have attempted to approach digital literacy practice environments from a culturally and linguistically local starting-point. Something of this sort is necessary, but not sufficient. It is preferable to approach this given within the framework of wider – global – changes, which also employ language as a vehicle urging people to new, global "ways of being". I will mention two suggestive examples in this direction. Machin/van Leeuwen (2003) studied 44 local editions of *Cosmopolitan* magazine and identified that the close relation between language and culture appears to be fracturing, for the first time in history. The local (often ethnic) language is a superficial phenomenon which plays no role in the formation of identity, but acts as a vehicle for the transfer of values for the 'global' model of femininity, promoted by the magazine as the 'fun, fearless female'. The article demonstrates that conceptualisations of local and hybrid practices are often extremely superficial and that it is now more essential than ever to seek to understand the key discourses and practices that shape the world of the media.

But it is not only in the world of fashion and lifestyle that something of this sort occurs; it also happens in the very logic that permeate scholarly research in the teaching of languages. Taking into consideration the 'communication skills' adopted in language teaching, Cameron points out that "it is not a new language which is imposed (this is not the danger) but 'unity through difference', the definition of what is acceptable and desirable, through the shaping of norms for global communication. Thus "language becomes a global product available in different local flavours", as she characteristically notes (Cameron 2003, 70).

We may agree that many modern communicative environments like the word processing programs, briefly discussed here, belong to this category of "global products" promoted through theories about language teaching and international magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, all of which seem entirely natural to us. But if we agree with this finding, this means that we need to review with greater attention all that has been discussed within the context of the first and second circles.

From the discussion in this section, it emerges that digital environments for reading, writing, and communication are not 'neutral' and that a critical approach is required in the course of their utilization for teaching. It also emerges that the focus on locality and cultural difference is necessary but not sufficient. The specific remarks are at heart no different from those made in the foregoing sub-section. There we pointed out the phenomenon of instrumentalist discourse, its wide dissemination as global discourse, and the consequences that are entailed in the utilization of ICTs in the teaching of (primarily) lesser-spoken languages. In this section, the focus was transferred to the non-neutral nature of digital environments for discourse production and the possible consequences for languages other than English. In the one case, we have a global discourse that is considered 'neutral' and adopted indiscriminately, while in the other we have global digital writing environments that are considered neutral when in fact they are not.

In both cases – especially the second – there was an effort to read the examples in the light of not only local but also wider variables. With the second variable, we began to turn our interest towards a broader approach in which the focus on locality, national languages, and cultural difference would enter into a dialogue with broader changes in our times of a global nature.

4.2 Changes in the written world: the dialectic between local and global

4.2.1 The Greek keyboard

There has been much discussion in the field of language teaching as regards the positive consequences of the use of computers in writing (Hawisher et al. 1996). Particular emphasis has also been given to the analysis of new forms of written discourse related to writing in environments featuring synchronous (chat rooms, Instant Messaging) and asynchronous (e-mail, forums) environments (see section 2). Much less weight has been given to the consequences of the wide adoption of computers for the production of written discourse in the lesser-used languages. We have already approached one facet of this topic in the previous section (4.1.2). In what follows, I will mention some indicative examples of the new givens introduced by the use of computers as tools for writing in Greek. The first thing we realize when we take careful note of a Greek keyboard is the fact that there is no key for the Greek semicolon (*ano telia*).[8] Inserting this punctuation mark into a text is therefore not easy for the average user. A variety of techniques are proposed on the internet for inserting it, including the following key combination: Alt + 729 or Alt + 0183 or 0387 + Alt + X.

On my computer (Windows Vista, Microsoft Office 2003), none of those combinations works and for this reason the complicated course of: Menu, insert, symbol, Greek semicolon is followed. The interesting thing is that this issue has not even been discussed, and there is no research concerning the consequences this omission has had on the system of punctuation marks in Greek. An initial estimate by the undersigned from an unpublished study of text corpora of journalistic and school discourse shows that there is a clearly declining trend in the use of the Greek semicolon, primarily in texts that have not been subjected to editing by specialists.

However, the question that has been discussed *in extenso*, and on which we will focus below, is that of the wide use of the Latin alphabet in the production of written discourse in Greek.

4.2.2 Greeklish

The choice of the American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII) as the character set for the first PCs created, as is widely known, less serious problems for languages whose writing system is based on the Latin alphabet (e.g. German, French, Spanish) but greater problems for other languages (Danet/Herring 2007). Since the writing system of Greek falls within the latter category, it was confronted by this initial 'technical' constraint.

To avoid communication problems, people began to make extensive use of the English alphabet in their writing of Greek, producing the hybrid commonly known as Greeklish (Greek + English). Despite technical advances in this area, and despite the fact that Unicode is designed to support the Greek writing system, Greeklish is now identified with

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8 The English-language symbol for this punctuation mark (the semi-colon, viz. [;]) is used in Greek for the question mark, while the Greek equivalent of the semi-colon is rendered in the Greek alphabet by [·].

the use of the technology by a large part of the population, especially those referred to by Lankshear/Knobel (2003) as 'insiders', i.e. the generation which grew up with the new technologies. Greeklish is used primarily in e-mail and among chat-groups, but also occurs in more formal electronic communication (by government departments and universities, for example) where both writing systems – Greek and Greeklish – are used to avoid communication problems.

This is a subject which has generated keen interest not only in the academic community, but also in the country's press, where opinions are divided (see Koutsogiannis/Mitsikopoulou 2003). There are those who view the spread of this phenomenon as a grave threat to the Greek language, a by-product of the process of globalisation and homogenization. On the other hand, there are those who see the issue as one of negligible significance, an inevitable result of Greece's involvement in global developments, a transitory phenomenon which will disappear as technology advances.

Most of the data at our disposal on this subject come from relatively old research (see Spilioti 2009; Tseliga 2007), and for this reason we provide some data from a more recent investigation. On a questionnaire completed by 4,174 teenagers (14-16 years old) from all over Greece,[9] there was a question about whether they use the Greek script or Greeklish when they are writing in Chat Rooms. Table 1 below shows that the largest percentage employs Greeklish (43.3%), versus 27.9% who use the Greek alphabet and 28.8% who use both, depending on the case. This finding is of particular interest if we take into consideration the fact that these children became familiarized with ICTs after 2000, i.e. when the problems with the Greek script should logically have been overcome due to Unicode's support of the Greek writing system.

		If you visit chat rooms you use:			
		Greek letters	Latin letters	Both, it depends	Total
State schools	%	31.5%	38.6%	29.9%	100.0%
Private school	%	12.1%	63.9%	23.9%	100.0%
Total	%	**27.9%**	**43.3%**	**28.8%**	100.0%

Table 1: Writing in chat rooms

The second result is that the use of the Latin alphabet is not simply a graphemic register employed by young people for specific electronic uses. It appears to be more related with specific social classes of children and specific practices. From the Table above we see that children belonging to the more privileged social classes, and who study at expensive private schools[10] where both computers and English are more widely employed, use Greeklish to a far greater extent (63.9%) than those at state schools (38.6%). To which we may reasonably ask: why do these children use the Latin alphabet to a greater degree than the Greek one?

In fact, the answer cannot be provided unless we examine the totality of English literacy practices by specific social groups. It seems that the use of the Latin alphabet is a con-

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[9]   This research was conducted in 2006. For a detailed description see Koutsogiannis (2007, 2011).
[10] In our sample there were 759 students, studying at expensive private schools where English is extensively taught; in quite a few of these schools, some other courses (e.g. ICT) were taught in English.

sequence of the extensive use and familiarity with English of children from privileged social classes (private schools in our case), since it has been found that children with precisely the same characteristics participate more in English-language Chat Rooms (Koutsogiannis 2009). In addition, this familiarity (with the functional use of English and ICTs) is a basic strategic objective of most parents belonging to the privileged social classes, a strategy that is *inter alia* implemented by sending their children to particular private schools.

It goes without saying that we do not consider the Greeklish phenomenon the result of this strategy, but of other givens (largely technical) that gave rise to it in the 1980s. Nor do we claim that this phenomenon is to be exclusively interpreted from this perspective. However, the data from this particular research project afford us powerful arguments for maintaining that the phenomenon of the use of Latin writing is fueled in part by a tendency for the wide use of English by some social classes. That is, we could say that it is further supported by the effort of some social classes to strengthen the extroversion of their children (Koutsogiannis 2009; Mitsikopoulou 2007). Within the framework of this logic, we could claim that the more English (obviously, in combination with the wide use of ICTs) permeates the daily lives of children, the more writing with Greeklish will be considered something natural, and the more it will increase.

Until now, we have considered new givens connected with the wide use of ICTs as environments for written expression in the Greek language. Comparable phenomena have been noted for other languages and countries (Paolillo 2007). Thus, we are dealing with givens that are related above all with languages that do not use the Latin alphabet. We also pointed out that heated discussions are being conducted about this phenomenon in the Greek press. But this is only one aspect of the topic. If we look at it from a somewhat broader perspective, we will find that similar discussions are also being conducted regarding English, and they are every bit as heated as the Greek ones. A large part of the press and media generally are noting with intense concern that written English is changing, and there is no dearth of publications suggesting that Computer Mediated Communication signals the slow death of the English language (Thurlow 2006).

We could thus say that we do not have changes related only to some languages. Rather, these are broader changes that are supported or acquire a specific content with the wide use of the new media, but they are not due to these new environments. A careful reading of the scholarly literature shows that wider changes are being observed in written language generally. These are due to larger changes (economic, social, cultural) and not related exclusively to the new media (e.g. Crystal 2008; Baron 2008). Research on text corpora highlight that in fact there is an observable tendency towards "colloquialisation" in written discourse, above all journalistic ones (Hundt/Mair 1999). These global trends towards alterations in written discourse have their local versions, and new technologies certainly play some role in the type and extent of these changes, but they are not solely responsible.

4.3   The importance of history

In the analyses undertaken in the foregoing section, we focused our interest on highlighting local phenomena, since most of the examples come from the Greek language

and Greek reality. Keeping in mind the danger lurking in an approach using local terms (Christidis 2009), at the same time we undertook to stress in each case discussed the fact that the local version is of interest, but it is worth recalling the wider, possibly global framework within which it is necessary to understand local particularities. From the discussion of these examples it emerged that focusing on the wider changes also affords us the chance to understand and better interpret the local particularities.

If, however, we have broader changes of the type of examples discussed above, this means that there is particular interest in our directly illuminating some of these. Following this logic, in the present section we will place special emphasis on highlighting the important role played by the historical framework in the understanding of developments. Thus, I will consciously diverge from the discussion of data of a local nature, and endeavour to focus on wider changes during our era, in order to provide further support to my argument that a historically-informed reading better illuminates research on individual local particularities. The discussion will be conducted with two examples chosen by the author, one related to what was discussed for the first circle and the second in connection with an exceptionally talked-about subject in language teaching, viz. e-learning.

4.3.1   Reading the ICT and language education discourse in an historical context

An important problem in the discussion about the utilization of ICTs in language teaching is related to the fact that these become consumed by the 'here and now' of teaching and only rarely is emphasis given to the search for possible developments of an historical nature that often go beyond scientific research.

In the case of the field under discussion, for example, we could consider that there were three key historical givens that marked some of the main perspectives on the utilization of ICTs in language teaching. The first is connected with the historical and political context of the years from 1950 to 1970, more specifically with the educational consequences of the *Cold War*. Following the end of WWII, the foundations began to be laid for the creation of a post-industrial America as global power. Its investments in technology, especially military technology, formed one of the priorities selected to contribute to this dominance, and above all to the elimination of its great rival at the time, the Soviet Union. Parallel to the emphasis on the physical and natural sciences, the investment of much state – and private – capital in technology towards the political-technological dominance of the U.S. offered the opportunity to strengthen research in the field of language teaching, especially foreign languages, for understandable political reasons (Hawisher et al. 1996).

These efforts could only be based on the leading scientific paradigms of the era, viz. behaviourism as regards learning, and structuralism as regards the study of language. These views, which were predominant in the U.S. down to the 1960s, although they had begun to be doubted scientifically, comprised the foundation on which the first computer programs were also based, as we say in section 2.

The second historical given is connected with the gradual transition after WWII, especially during the last three-four decades, to an economy and society of a post-industrial type in quite a few countries of the West and the U.S., where the learner cannot be con-

sidered 'passive'; rather, (s)he is 'active'. An emphasis on what we call today 'traditional literacy', known as the 'basics' in the Anglo-Saxon world, was not sufficient from the moment that the U.S. and the rest of the Western world gradually began entering the post-industrial stage of production and economic development. This means that the skills of reading and writing were not enough for the type of citizens the new economy and society demanded. The new-style economy, which gradually began to demand more thoughtful individuals and fewer simple followers of orders, obviously had a need of new theories as well. It is easier for us to comprehend the intense scientific and technological research of the critical decades after 1970 within such an interpretative framework.

If one carefully analyzes the research during the same period in regard to the utilization of computers in language teaching, one finds that this change is easily traced to the sort of digital environments and pedagogical theories being proposed. Basically, we do not have just one "Copernican Revolution" due to the fact that until then the computer was viewed as teacher (= Tutor), while afterwards it was considered a means for facilitating language teaching (= Tool) (Hawisher et al. 1996, 46). We have also a significant revolution as regards how the learners, and by extension teachers, were understood. To put it simply: we have an important turn in the 'technology' of teaching itself,[11] consequently in the sort of learner identities proposed to be created, and not merely in the means employed (to accomplish this).

The third given was discussed above in section 3 and is connected with the second circle, where emphasis was given to the emergence of particularities that the reconstruction of meaning on the screen has in relation to those in print. At heart, however, this is not merely related to the fact that ICTs are literacy practice environments, or with the fact that multimodal expression is made easier. Here too, the change is a deeper one, and is connected with the type of reader created by wide employment of the screen in communication. In many of his texts, Kress (2003, 2010) has aptly remarked that the transition from print to screen and multimodal text both entails and presupposes a different identity for readers: from the discipline imposed on the reader by the strict syntactic arrangement of written discourse in print, to reading as relaxation and pleasure favoured by the multimodal recreation of meaning on the screen; from the concentration demanded by the reading of traditional written discourse to the laxity of browsing favoured by the multimodal web text. This is a development corresponding to other, similar developments in many facets of a largely consumerist everyday life.

However, if we approach matters from an historical perspective, then the question is not only precisely which technology we will employ, which environments we will develop for our language, how many computers we need in our schools, etc. The issue becomes deeply political and we are required to respond to vital questions regarding the sort of teaching practices we want to support and why, the mix of older (e.g. print) and newer (digital media) technologically-mediated communication we will employ and, most profoundly, the sort of literate identities we are interested in cultivating through language teaching. And finally, we are required to provide an answer to the question of what type of society we are interested in creating.

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[11] With the content given the term 'technology' by Foucault (see Ball 1990).

4.3.2   E-learning and the new global economic order

In the previous section we attempted to show that the emphasis on history forms the requisite framework for understanding the rapid development in the realms of communication and teaching. In this section we become more specific, aiming to highlight through an example from e-learning the close relationship between technological research and wider changes.

Below I cite two indicative examples from the proceedings of the international conference Online Educa Berlin.[12] Reading these examples, it is difficult to gather that they come from an academic text that endeavours to show other attendees that this particular university is exploiting e-learning in order to adjust to the new givens of European and global competition it is being asked to respond to.

> (1)
> In regards to **competition** to be an early adopter can **pay off**. As Clarc Aldrich (2000), **a senior market analyst** with Gartner Group, states "**Educate your customers before your competitors do**" (Online Educa Berlin 2003, 145).

> (2)
> Universities have the choice **to be leaders or followers** in innovation. Advantages for **innovation leaders** are the chance to **capture large market shares**, and **establish a brand name** while disadvantages are the **higher cost** of deployment for early adopters, the **increased risk of failure**, the **limited availability of support services**, and the risk that the E-learning system may have to be replaced after a short time by a new generation of E-learning systems. (Online Educa Berlin 2003, 141)

No particular analysis is needed to ascertain that academic discourse is being completely 'colonized' by market discourse (Fairclough 2003) in these particular examples. We merely highlight the words and expressions that make this obvious.

Below we will offer some material to make the context within which these particular texts were produced more understandable. It is the year 2003, the year when some of the changes in European universities in the direction of the Bologna Process were starting to be implemented. E-learning was beginning to be regarded as not simply a means ('tool') to better serve university teaching, but as an additional means ('tool') for helping universities 'capture large market shares', bring more 'customers', and contribute significantly to 'establishing a brand name'.

The rhetoric normally accompanying e-learning in the case of language teaching is well known. From the above discussion it is obvious that we cannot approach any technology independent of the context in which it is being exploited. The views that permeate the two excerpts above about e-learning are not accidental; rather, they are closely related to wider changes taking place from 2000 onward in the European academic realm.

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[12] This is a yearly international conference held in Berlin. I provide indicative examples and findings from Mitsikopoulou/Koutsogiannis (2005).

From the discussion about e-learning and that of the sub-section that preceded it concerning the important changes we have in the "identification" process (Fairclough 2003) of modern readers, there emerges the necessity to recontextualize whatever discussions are conducted within the context of the first and second circles into a broader framework, complete with historical awareness.

5.   Conclusions

This text attempted to classify discussions about the didactic use of ICTs in language teaching in three circles. In the first circle falls the discussion that treats ICTs as pedagogical tools that contribute significantly to the improvement of teaching. In the second circle falls another category of scholarly discussions that treat ICTs as literacy practice environments with specific features and which goes in search of the consequences of the 'new communicative order' in the content and context of language teaching itself. I propose to re-examine the content of both these circles, i.e. to treat these new means both as literacy practice environments and as teaching tools, making creative employment of both traditions.

However, in order to highlight facets that are only rarely allowed to emerge and be discussed, I gave the greatest weight to those placed in the third circle. The fields discussed were indicative, in order to bring out the logic rather than to exhaust so complex an issue. For this circle, however, the focus on specific cases and examples was not as important as the logic itself. I maintain that most of the scholarly discussions ongoing today and being conducted within the framework of the two inner circles overemphasize the role, power, and particular characteristics of the medium, while minimizing the various dimensions related to the distinctiveness of languages and local cultural traditions. At the same time, focusing on the 'here and now' of teaching, they are 'blinded' by the brilliance of each successive new technological opportunity, and incapable of incorporating developments into a clear historical context.

My emphasis on the overall historic context is the third (outer) circle I propose as the framework for understanding the contents of the other two circles with greater scientific suspicion. I believe that this is the circle that suits the European academic tradition perfectly, and which may form the framework for mapping out a European policy on such an important issue as that of the utilization of ICTs in language teaching.

6.   References

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