



Book review

Τρίγλωσσο Εικονογραφημένο Λεξικό για Παιδιά: Αλβανικά–Ελληνικά–Αγγλικά

Σοφία Στεφανίδου (2010). Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Πατάκης. Σελ. 103.

[*Trilingual Picture Dictionary for Children: Albanian- Greek-English*.

Sophia Stefanidou (2010). Athens: Patakis Publications. Pp. 103]

The present-day multilingual and multicultural reality in a European Union context is reflected in the recent curriculum reforms for compulsory education, i.e. the Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework (henceforth CTCF) and in particular the principle of “reinforcing cultural and linguistic diversity within a multicultural society” (CTCF, Pedagogical Institute n.d. a: 13). To achieve this curricular objective, it is necessary to develop “communicative competence” (linguistic, sociolinguistic and socio-cultural) in “the mother tongue as well as other languages” (: *ibid*). In the curriculum area of direct concern to this journal, that is foreign language education in general and English language education in particular, the discourse of multilingualism embedded in the CTFF emerges as a key dimension of foreign language pedagogy alongside multiculturalism and foreign language literacy. Multilingualism is seen as an important dimension of foreign language learning which leads, among others, to “developing an awareness of the differences between languages” (CTFC, Pedagogical Institute n.d.b: 147). While in the CTCF context mother tongue refers to the majority (Greek) language and foreign languages refer to the languages of other European Union member states, as Fay *et al* (2010) have argued, this could be extended to include minority, community and immigrant languages, thereby building on the learners’ living reality to develop multilingual and multicultural awareness. Indeed, in the Greek context, children who speak a language other than Greek at home represent a significant portion of the pupil population in Greek schools and classrooms, which undoubtedly makes present day Greece a linguistically and culturally rich country. Regardless of these recent curricular developments, there is still a dearth of appropriate resources to develop multilingual skills and multicultural awareness for young learners in Greece. Sophia Stefanidou’s “Trilingual Picture Dictionary for Children: Albanian- Greek-English” is a welcoming contribution to this direction. According to the author, the target audience of the dictionary is children aged 5-7 who are learning to read and write in three languages: Albanian, Greek and English.

The dictionary is comprised of the following sections: an introduction, the main body of the dictionary and an index at the end of the dictionary. More specifically, in the introduction, the author outlines the overall organization of the dictionary and its rationale. The aim of the dictionary is to introduce young learners to multilingualism as well as support and enhance their emergent literacy learning in Albanian, Greek and English. The author points out that all the entries first appear in Albanian, followed by a translation in Greek and then in English. She cogently argues for the need to foreground Albanian in the dictionary “because as a lesser-spoken and lesser-taught language it is at a disadvantage today [*vis-à-vis* Greek and English] regardless of its linguistic complexity and long history of language

use" (p. 7). Albanian belongs to the Indo-European language family, similar to Greek and English, and it is written in Roman script. The introduction is in Greek and Albanian. The main body of the dictionary contains a basic vocabulary of 600 entries in alphabetical order in Albanian. The author provides both the definite and indefinite forms for each lexical item selected per entry in Albanian. In the introduction, she explains that the indefinite form is constructed by adding the article "nje" [a] before the noun as in "nje flutur" [a butterfly]. The definite form is constructed by adding a suffix at the end of the noun (flutura) (*ibid*). Each entry is accompanied by a picture and by the lexical item in the three languages. At the end of the main body of the dictionary, there is a short section on verbs in the present continuous form, the four seasons, months of the year and days of the week. The dictionary also contains an index with all entries in alphabetical order in Greek. The author, however, does not explicitly state the criteria for choosing the basic vocabulary, the verbs and other lexical items in the short sections as well as the layout of the dictionary. The dictionary would benefit from a more contextualized presentation of each entry reflecting the cognitive maturity and age of the target users.

As the publisher notes on the back cover, it is aimed at children of Albanian origin and children attending primary schools, which follow an intercultural pedagogy. Indeed, an important contribution of the dictionary as a multilingual resource is that it takes as its point of departure the immigrant language rather than the majority (Greek) or foreign (English) languages. As recent research on Albanian language maintenance has illustrated, Albanian as an immigrant language in Greece is widely spoken yet there is low societal prestige associated with its use (Maligkoudi 2010, Gogonas 2010). Moreover, its use is often stigmatized inside and outside the classroom setting. Foregrounding Albanian, therefore, serves both an instrumental and a symbolic purpose: it contributes to the children's literacy learning in Albanian and the development of positive attitudes towards the maintenance and development of the home language. At the same time, the dictionary has a broader language-awareness potential that goes well beyond intercultural schools and classrooms. My 7-year-old son's interest in the dictionary and his comments are indicative: when he saw the dictionary on my desk, he asked me if he could have a look. As he was flicking through it he tried to read some of the Albanian words and commented on how similar certain words sounded with English, e.g. elefant-elephant, eksperiment-experiment (p. 20) or helikopter-helicopter, insekt-insect (p. 30) and with Greek, e.g. kuti-κουτί, bastun-μπαστούνι, barkë-βάρκα (pp. 12-13). When I asked him what he thought of the dictionary he said he liked it and found it interesting. My own research in an Athens primary school has shown how majority and minority children draw on a wide range of linguistic resources (Greek, Turkish, English and other instructed foreign languages) for learning, play and social affiliation regardless of important differences in competence and access (Lytra 2007).

The dictionary would, therefore, benefit by making its broader language awareness potential more explicit. Although I concur with the author's point in the introduction regarding enhancing pupil agency through the child's solitary involvement with the dictionary, learning, including language learning, especially among young children, is primarily a joint enterprise (e.g. Gregory *et al* 2004). Children learn by actively participating in meaning making with adults and peers. It would, therefore, be useful to include language awareness raising activities for children of Albanian as well as non-Albanian heritage. Activities could appear at the end of the dictionary or in electronic format (CD-ROM). They would need to be accompanied by clear guidance to teachers, parents/older siblings and peers about how to support the children when doing them at home or at school. To this end, it would be useful to include the Albanian alphabet and a pronunciation key to facilitate access for non-Albanian speakers. Moreover, the dictionary would benefit by foregrounding the role of

English in developing multilingual skills and multicultural awareness. As Fay *et al* (2010) have sought to show, existing teaching materials with a foreign language orientation can be transformed through a series of repositional activities towards a multicultural one. In this context, it would be useful to include an introduction in English and an index with all the entries in alphabetical order also in English.

With some guidance, Sophia Stefanidou's "Trilingual Picture Dictionary for Children: Albanian- Greek-English" is suitable for both children of Albanian heritage with emergent literacy in Albanian, Greek and English and children of non-Albanian heritage. The dictionary will also be of interest to teachers and parents who are committed to enhancing young learners' multilingual skills and multicultural awareness at home and at school, contributing to the CTCF's objectives and responding to the rapidly changing demographics of Greece today and beyond.

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