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## Language ideologies and washback effects in a high-stakes Greek language examination

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This paper examines the washback effect of the Greek language test component, of the annual national university entrance examination in Greece. In order to explain the reasons behind student underachievement on the aforementioned language exam, we adopted a mixed methods approach combining (a) sample document analysis of national curricula and past examination papers from 2000 to date and (b) a quantitative and qualitative analysis of practice test papers by 4 focal students, produced during their final year at school. The results suggest that the assessment criteria produced by the Ministry of Education are rather vague and generic. They seem to target the 'correct' production of pseudo-genres with specific content and ideological agenda; implicitly, a single, 'formal' register is expected (indexed by the use of archaic morphology, subordination in the syntax, formal fixed expressions and vocabulary) and emphasis is placed on the 'correct' production of paragraph structure. Despite "teaching to the test", progress in the students' language skills examined in this study was only random. We suggest that this is ultimately an aspect of the washback effect as the criteria covertly implemented for exam preparation target a very narrowly defined subset of linguistic skills, presented out of context and taught through repetition, without honing (critical) metalinguistic awareness.

**Keywords:** test washback, EFL, document analysis, test papers, teaching to the test

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### 1. Introduction

#### *1.1 Washback effects, language ideologies and the Panhellenic Greek Language examination for university admission*

The consequences of assessing student performance, especially through high-stakes examinations, has long attracted the interest of researchers, teachers, examiners and the general public. Various researchers refer to the effects of such examinations in the field of language assessment (Cheng & Curtis, 2004; Tsagari & Cheng, 2016). The term 'test washback'

is most widely used to refer to the influence of (high-stakes) language tests on the teaching and learning that take place prior to their administration (Alderson & Wall, 1993).

The washback effect is considered a consequence of participating in high-stakes exams (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Hamp-Lyons, 1997), is a potential means of bringing about educational reform (Pearson, 1988; Shohamy, 1992) and affects not only teaching and learning (Buck, 1988; Alderson & Wall, 1993; Messick, 1996) but also the teachers and the students themselves (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Bailey, 1999; Tsagari, 2009). The washback effect is also considered potentially positive (beneficial), negative (harmful) or neutral (Buck, 1988; Heaton, 1990; Messick, 1996; Shohamy et al., 1996) and can be intentional or unintentional (Andrews, 2004; Qi, 2004). Finally, there is a direct relationship between the stakes of a language test and the force of the washback effect, i.e., the higher the stakes of a language test, the stronger its washback effect (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Research so far has undoubtedly contributed significantly to the study of the washback effect. However, this area needs further research, especially in different cultural and educational contexts. Spratt (2005, p. 27) points out that:

There is a need for more studies to be carried out in different learning contexts. Use of parallel methodologies for studies in different contexts might also allow researchers to investigate some of the apparent contradictions in the findings to date.

Investigating the washback effects of language tests is a difficult task, as the relationship between testing/assessment and teaching is a really complex one (causal or exploratory) and can be influenced by various mediating factors, as has been shown by several studies to date. Such complexity poses very interesting challenges for research (Tsagari & Cheng, 2016 and references therein). The case of the Panhellenic exams for university admission is therefore a very fruitful field of research as regards the washback effect on teaching and learning in all subjects, but especially in Modern Greek Language courses. On the one hand, as is constantly pointed out by many stakeholders and institutions in Greece, the students' language performance is not satisfactory; at the same time many teachers, parents, students and other stakeholders involved in the teaching and assessment process point out that the structure, the content and the aims of the Greek language exam do not correspond to actual language competences and language use; examination topics and assessment criteria are almost univocally criticised for promoting the production of "stiff", stilted or even verbose language and the reproduction of predetermined contents with particular ideological slants or biases, as explained in subsequent sections. On the other hand, as the Panhellenic Greek language examination is a high-stakes one, performance in it seems to determine the aims and objectives as well as the structure and content of Greek language teaching in the last grades of high school in public and private schools and certainly in private tuition centres, whose sole aim is to ensure success in the Panhellenic exams overall. Therefore, it would appear that we have a classic case of a washback effect of a high-stakes exam, and it is interesting to explore in what sense the content and structure of the essays produced as part of the exam are determined by (ideological) aspects of the Greek socio-cultural and educational context, why

the washback effect is so strong and if this effect has positive results for the learning process or, conversely, if it is detrimental to the fostering of (critical) literacy.

This paper attempts a preliminary investigation of these issues through an exploration of relevant documents and through a case study, which shows that teaching for the purposes of success in assessment (“teaching to the test”) has negative results for the cultivation of literacy, precisely because the essays produced as part of the aforementioned exam do not assess real linguistic and literacy skills but indirectly cultivate and reproduce ideologically entrenched positions on literacy, which determine and regulate the ways in which student language production is evaluated, and, consequently, how language is taught and learnt.

### 1.2 The research

The research presented in this paper examines, through a case study, the contents and the objectives of the examination papers of the Panhellenic examinations in Modern Greek Language. More specifically, the research examines the causes of students' poor performance and investigates whether this is due to the content and structure of the exam tasks, to (inconsistencies with) the objectives of the National Curricula and/or to washback effects of the Panhellenic examinations on the Greek language and literacy teaching and learning.

We present and discuss the form, content and objectives of the Greek language test papers from 2001 to 2019 in order to determine whether assessment is in line with the objectives of the National Curricula for Language (Programme of Studies, 1999; DEPPS, 2003; National Curriculum, 2011). We also present a preliminary analysis of written essays by 4 students of the final grade of senior high school (Lykeio), which examines aspects such as the structure and organisation of the texts, their coherence and cohesion, the selection of the appropriate genre and their grammatical and lexical diversity. In this paper we focus on a small-scale quantitative and qualitative investigation through ratings of the essays by experienced assessors. The results show that there was no significant improvement in the language skills of the participants from the beginning to the end of the final school year.

## 2. The educational and ideological context of the exams

The Panhellenic examinations are annual high-stakes examinations and are considered a key educational event in Greece, as is evidenced by extensive media coverage and heated debates around them; the exam questions / topics are set centrally by committees of experts, while the Modern Greek Language paper (still informally referred to by its old-fashioned name: “Composition”) is common for all students, irrespective of field of study. The papers are anonymous and are graded by two assessors. The Greek language exam is taken by over 70,000 students each year:

YEAR	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES
2016	85,614
2017	102,214

2018	96,140
2019	92,022
2020	71,184
2021	74,141
2022	71,268

Table 1. Numbers of candidates between 2016 and 2022 (<https://aeitei.gr/statistika-epidoseon.php>)

That these are high-stakes examinations is evident from the sheer numbers of participants but also from the yearly kerfuffle in the media around the difficulty of the examination questions, the (in)ability of the students to cope, etc. (see Figure 1).

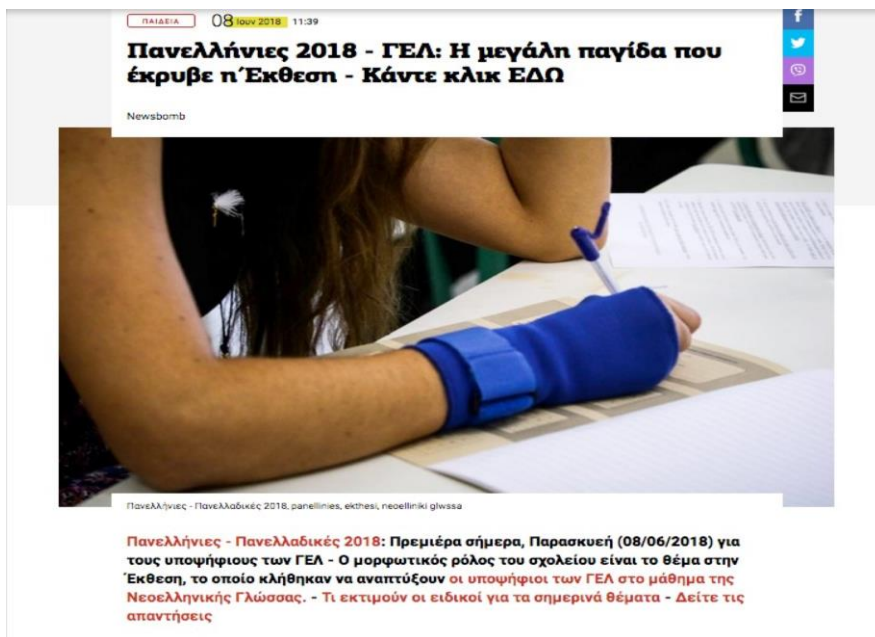


Figure 1. “The great hidden snare in Composition” (<https://www.newsbomb.gr/ellada/paideia/story/891336/panellinies-2018-gel-themata-kai-apantiseis-h-megali-pagida-poy-ekryve-i-ekthesi-kante-klik-edo>)

Of particular interest is the fact that almost every year the media and teachers of all levels express views on the “language deficit” of students based on the results in “Composition”; these views often express volubly moral panic and, on occasion, there is also fake news and disinformation exaggerating students’ low achievement, as in Figure 2 from 2014:



Figure 2. “One out of two students did not earn a passing grade in Composition” (<https://www.parapolitika.gr/ellada/article/114834/panelladikes-2014-kato-apo-ti-basi-egrapse-enas-stous-duo-stin-ekthesi/>)

As the Ministry of Education report in Figure 3 shows, the failure rates reported by the media, while at a rather high 20%, are nowhere near 50%.

ΠΙΝΑΚΑΣ ΣΥΓΚΡΙΤΙΚΟΣ ΤΗΣ ΒΑΘΜΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ ΓΡΑΠΤΗΣ ΕΞΕΤΑΣΗΣ ΜΑΘΗΤΩΝ Γ' ΛΥΚΕΙΟΥ ΕΤΟΥΣ 2014 ΣΕ ΣΥΓΚΡΙΣΗ ΜΕ ΤΑ ΕΤΗ 2008-2013 ΚΑΤΑ ΜΑΘΗΜΑ ΜΕ ΒΑΣΗ ΤΟ 10												
Α/Α	ΜΑΘΗΜΑ	ΧΑΡΑΚΤΗΡΙΣΜΟΣ ΜΑΘΗΜΑΤΟΣ	0 - 9,9									
			2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2008	2009	2010
ΠΟΣΟΣΤΟ %												
1	ΝΕΟΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΓΛΩΣΣΑ	ΓΕΝ. ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑΣ	25,88	22,57	24,10	20,44	22,83	12,99	20,01	74,11	77,42	75,89

Figure 3. The actual percentage of students who did not earn a passing grade in “Composition” in 2014 (<https://www.minedu.gov.gr/anazitisi-archive/statistika-stoixeia-panelladikwn>)

As we will argue later, these reactions have to do with the fact that the stakes and the investment in student success in “Composition” are not only practical / material but also, and *par excellence*, ideological.

Leaving ideologically-driven reactions aside, actual data suggest that student performance is rather unsatisfactory, with around 20% of students consistently failing to earn the passing grade (10 out of 20), as can be seen in Figure 4. Below we present the Ministry of Education Data for 2021 per Track of Study.

GRADE	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	%
19 - 20	17	0.08 %
18 - 19	311	1.38 %
17 - 18	940	4.16 %
16 - 17	1784	7.90 %
15 - 16	2432	10.76 %
14 - 15	2888	12.78 %

13 - 14	2737	12.11 %
12 - 13	2524	11.17 %
11 - 12	2156	9.54 %
10 - 11	1724	7.63 %
5 - 10	4381	19.39 %
0 - 5	700	3.10 %
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22,594</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Table 2. Track 1: Humanities and Law, 2021

(<https://aeitei.gr/statistikaepidoseon.php?year=2021&ypourgio=pedias&katefthinsi=1>)

GRADE	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	%
19 – 20	7	0.05 %
18 – 19	139	0.95 %
17 – 18	514	3.50 %
16 – 17	1244	8.47 %
15 – 16	1793	12.21 %
14 – 15	2302	15.68 %
13 – 14	2190	14.92 %
12 – 13	2061	14.04 %
11 – 12	1497	10.20 %
10 – 11	1145	7.80 %
5 – 10	1642	11.18 %
0 – 5	149	1.01 %
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14,683</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Table 3. Track 2: Mathematics and Science, 2021

(<https://aeitei.gr/statistika-epidoseon.php?year=2021&ypourgio=pedias&katefthinsi=2>)

GRADE	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	%
19 - 20	21	0.16 %
18 - 19	280	2.19 %
17 - 18	933	7.29 %
16 - 17	1607	12.55 %
15 - 16	1926	15.04 %
14 - 15	1898	14.82 %
13 - 14	1693	13.22 %
12 - 13	1271	9.93 %
11 - 12	1009	7.88 %
10 - 11	660	5.15 %
5 - 10	1255	9.80 %
0 - 5	252	1.97 %
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12,805</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Table 4. Track 3: Health and Life Sciences, 2021

(<https://aeitei.gr/statistika-epidoseon.php?year=2021&ypourgio=pedias&katefthinsi=3>)

GRADE	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	%
19 - 20	3	0.01 %
18 - 19	39	0.16 %
17 - 18	238	0.98 %
16 - 17	681	2.80 %
15 - 16	1368	5.62 %
14 - 15	2107	8.65 %
13 - 14	2758	11.32 %
12 - 13	3057	12.55 %
11 - 12	2959	12.15 %
10 - 11	2612	10.72 %
5 - 10	7127	29.26 %
0 - 5	1412	5.80 %
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24,361</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Table 5. Track 4: Economics and Information Technology, 2021 (<https://aeitei.gr/statistika-epidoseon.php?year=2021&ypourgio=pedias&katefthinsi=4>)

The failure rate is lowest in Track 3 (at around 12%, see Table 4), as this track attracts high-achieving students usually aiming for a place in the prestigious Schools of Medicine; it is at its highest in Track 4 (at around 35%, see Table 5), which usually attracts the weakest students. Results from previous years are directly comparable (see <https://aeitei.gr/statistika-epidoseon.php> and Figure 3 above).<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1 Autonomous literacy and ideology

As is argued in the literature, in public education in Greece there seems to be a large underlying ideological investment in models of autonomous literacy (Street, 1995) that consequently promote prescriptive attitudes of language and ideologically driven approaches to “knowledge” (Fragoudaki, 1987; Kostouli & Mitakidou, 2009; Moschonas, 2005; Tsiplakou 2007, 2015, 2016; Xydopoulos & Tsiplakou, 2022). The links between autonomous literacy models and hegemonic ideologies and conservative or even oppressive pedagogies have been extensively discussed in the literature. In brief, autonomous literacy implies prioritising linguistic and textual forms and structures and, consequently, educational practices that ignore the social and ideological dimensions of language, the fact that different linguistic forms, genres, structures and linguistic varieties are used in specific social and cultural contexts to construct particular positionings and interpretations of “reality” and to promote particular forms of social action according to the interests and aspirations of the authors and the social or power groups they represent (Baynham, 1995; Cope & Kalantzis, 2020; Gee, 2015; Kalantzis & Cope, 2012).

<sup>1</sup> We do not discuss the latest data from 2022, as a new form of the test including Greek Literature was introduced for the first time, so a proper comparison is not feasible (see <https://aeitei.gr/statistika-epidoseon.php>).

In contrast, models of ideological literacy (Street, 1995) or critical literacy (Baynham, 1995) aim to reveal the use and function of language in its social contexts and to critically evaluate explicit or implicit ideological positions in texts. This implies that in the education process the cultivation of literacy includes critical analysis of various genres and forms of language, linguistic varieties, including stigmatised or hybrid varieties and translanguaging, hybrid textual forms, etc., using the tools of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992; Blommaert, 2005; Wodak, 2013), so that students are able to understand and evaluate the social positionings, ideologies and discourses, be they hegemonic or not, that are constructed through the content, structure and form of texts. In contrast, autonomous literacy models promote the cultivation of only certain forms of language or linguistic varieties, and do not explore the relationship of forms of language and texts to their social contexts. They promote the abstract, decontextualized “philosophical” essay as a more “demanding” and, therefore, as a more highly valued genre. Consequently, standard linguistic varieties, espouse ideologies about standard language (Lippi-Green, 1997; Milroy & Milroy, 1999; Xydopoulos & Tsiplakou, 2022) as cognitive and intellectually more demanding and ignoring the use of language in its real social contexts, as well as sociolinguistic variation and diversity.

The pedagogical implications of the autonomous model are obvious. It leads to what Kalantzis and Cope (2012) have termed a pedagogy of the transmission of inherited knowledge without active creative participation on the part of students in the process of learning. This is a pedagogy which silences the varied ‘voices’ and linguistic varieties of the classroom and disregards the social and cultural capital that students bring with them from their communities; a pedagogy that does not value or capitalise on alternative literacy practices that the children may have at their disposal. It is not surprising that autonomous literacy models are closely linked to the transmission of dominant hegemonic ideologies. Although the cultivation of “demanding forms of language” is supposed to lead to the honing of critical thinking, in reality, the contents and values transmitted through this pedagogy are non-negotiable, as they bear the hallmark of linguistic and qualitative ‘superiority’. Thus, the knowledge that is transmitted is ideologically embedded and naturally couched in linguistic forms, registers or varieties (in our case “scholarly”, verbose Standard Modern Greek; see Fliatouras & Anastasiadi-Symeonidi, 2019) that function as indexicals (see Silverstein, 2003) of a high educational level, of cognitive and intellectual superiority, of complex thinking, of a high level of literacy, etc. in the Greek linguistic and educational community.

The fact that the predominant literacy model in the Greek education system is autonomous and not critical is shown in the history of the National Curricula. In short, in the 1980s but especially in the 1990s, the famous shift from a grammar-centred to a text-centred and/or communicative approach took place (Tsiplakou, 2016). A key feature of this shift was the emphasis on cultivating awareness of textual and communicative appropriateness. Indeed, the National Curriculum (Programme of Studies, 1999 and the Interdisciplinary Unitary Framework for Programmes of Study (DEPPS, 2003), a reprint of the Programme of Studies of 1999, which was in use at the time of data collection for this paper) seems to have attempted a shift towards a communicative approach and genre literacy:



Speech production, therefore, is any text, oral or written, produced by students in a specific communicative situation, with a specific purpose. The length and style of such texts are determined by the genre that is produced: a friendly or a formal letter, a description of events in a casual or a formal style, a narration of events in an experiential way, a presentation of views on topics that are familiar to the student and are linked to his interests, and so on.

(DEPPS, 2003, p. 62)

However, the objective of “communicative adequacy” is not clearly defined, genres are treated prescriptively and as static entities (while there is frequent confusion between text type and genre, since narrative, description and argumentation are treated as genres; see Tsiplakou & Floros, 2013; Tsiplakou, 2015); in addition, the presumed promotion of the cultivation of metalinguistic awareness of the relationship between language and social reality is undermined from within. The Programme of Studies (PS) of 1999 (and DEPPS, 2003) adopts, albeit vaguely, some notion of social / critical literacy:

Language is a social product: it emanates from society, serves society and returns [sic] to it.

[...] Language should be taught in relation to the social events [sic] that produce and nurture it [sic].

Language is social interaction: Through language, members of a language community receive and exert influence.

For teaching this means that language must be produced in its natural social-interactive context.

(PS, 1999, pp. 7239-40)

However, the PS concludes that ultimately the linguistic forms and genres that the school must cultivate are those of school literacy, which qualify as “standard” or “acceptable” because they are the genres and language of science, of literature, of urban centres:

Thus our language functions [sic] with a multitude of linguistic varieties, geographical (subvarieties, dialects) and social (special languages, etc.). Our purpose is the study of the whole of this linguistic treasure and its use in social and communicative circumstances / conditions. One of these language varieties is the one we cultivate at school. It is the linguistic variety in which students' textbooks, projects / compositions, etc. are written. It is taught and is related [sic] to the language spoken in the urban centres of the country and written by writers of the Greek canon. This linguistic variety is also used in science, administration, letters, arts, etc., adapting each time to the specific (administrative, etc.) communicative conditions.

(PS, 1999, p. 7245)

The “communicative” dimension is therefore essentially limited to a small set of genres and communicative situations and to the cultivation of a “standard” variety; none of the above are adequately described, while the goal of critical metalinguistic awareness is conspicuously absent (see also Alefantos, 2012; Tsiplakou, 2015).

The Programme of Studies of 2011 (which was preceded by the Republic of Cyprus Programme of Studies for Language of 2010, both programmes having some authors in common and a common philosophy; see Chatzisavvidis et al., 2010; Hadjioannou et al., 2011), was the first attempt to introduce critical literacy to Greek education. This program set some clearly defined goals of critical literacy, as students were called upon:

-to understand that linguistic forms (ways of writing and pronunciation, morphological, syntactic and lexical choices, genres) function as indexicals of aspects of social life and as mechanisms for constructing identities, ideologies, attitudes and behaviours, so that students will be able to highlight the relationship of the language of the texts with various social conditions and ideologies and to critically approach these relationships;

-to understand that modern Greek, like any living language, is characterised by geographical and social variation, which is deployed by its users to encode social and cultural meanings, so that students will be able to capitalise on diversity creatively and to assess its socio-cultural roles;

-to use as part of their linguistic capital pre-existing or emerging knowledge of dialects, sociolects or other languages from their local communities and to compare them systematically and critically with the standard variety, linguistically, stylistically and as regards their communicative and social dimensions (as a means of building alternative meanings, genres, identities, etc.);

-to understand that genres and their concomitant linguistic forms are products of social factors and power relations among communicators, that is, that they are not typologically fixed and unchanging categories, but are transformed historically and synchronically on the basis of the communicative needs of each community and on the basis of economic, political and cultural changes.

(PS, 2011, pp. 7-8)

However, the Programme of Studies of 2011 was never actually implemented, as the implementation was left to the discretion of the teachers.

The New Programme of Study for Language and Literature of 2021 (Government Gazette B 4402/23.09.2021) appears to incorporate some elements of critical literacy; as it is still too soon to assess its impact on student performance, we will not be discussing it in this paper.

## 2.2 Autonomous literacy and “Composition”

The gaps and fissures in the current Programme of Study involve the absence of the presumed communicative approach, of elements of critical literacy, and the promotion of a model of autonomous literacy that considers the production of texts in standard language and with a quasi-philosophical slant (comparable to the famous “seven paragraph essay”) as the hallmark of linguistic competence and literacy. These positions are directly reflected in the examination of language and literacy skills in the Panhellenic examinations. The “Composition” topics in the exam usually come from essays written for school literacy purposes (e.g., *Practical Philosophy*, a 1964 book by educator and philosopher E. Papanoutsos or *The Modern Man*, a 1966 book by I.M. Panagiotopoulos, or from articles by more contemporary scientists or intellectuals). Despite other changes to the examination essay, which will be discussed in the following section, the topics of the “Composition” remain constant over time in terms of subject matter and ideological orientation:

Composition topic, 1985:

He who is determined to advance in his learning and to excel in science or in some craft [art?] no longer aspires, according to current views, only to his personal prosperity; he offers valuable succour to others.

Reference text (i.e., text for reading comprehension, extract), 2014:

Being human is a cyclical presence. It is not geared towards a single point on the horizon. He who is truly human cannot but be human on all occasions. Being human is not a profession, it is not a means of self-promotion and success. It is self-denial. You have to abandon a lot in order to gain what is most essential.

Write an article, to be published in a local newspaper, referring to phenomena that prove the lack of humanity in our time, but also to activities, individual and collective, aimed at reducing this deficit.

(I.M. Panagiotopoulos, 1966)

It is obvious that the exam topics have a specific ideological orientation: A specific ideological position about man (gender intended) as a social being is consistently promoted, as are particular values such as cooperation, altruism, self-denial, tradition, national identity, “middle ground” as a virtue, the values of bourgeois democracy, peace, philanthropy, respect for the environment, etc. We do not wish to comment on or evaluate these ideologies here; after all, any such commentary would be necessarily ideologically entrenched (Xydopoulos & Tsiplakou, 2022). What we are interested in is that specific ideological positions that are cultivated in the context of school literacy and the educational system at large are presented as naturalised, universal truths, with no room for critical reflection and without clarifying their ideological dimension, which remains covert. Thus, in the two examples above, “humanity” is

presented as a universal value as are the consequent proposed behaviours, without acknowledging that this value emerges within specific social, historical and class contexts and that the concepts of “humanity” and humanism can be interpreted differently depending on historical and social milieus and conditions.

Prior to 2000, writing skills were assessed only on the basis of the “Composition” while reading skills were not assessed. Based on the exam topic (which consisted only of an extract such as the one above, with no further explanation or clarifications), the candidates were expected to write in a genre that was not defined or required in the exam question; students were expected to know, although this was not explicitly stated or described in language classes at school, that they were supposed to write some type of formal/philosophical essay and that they should follow some conventions of school literacy, i.e., that the essay ought to have an introduction, a main body, some conclusions, a central idea in each paragraph, etc., in standard, scholarly Greek (whatever that is) and using a “rich vocabulary”. As was discussed above, such textual merits are broadly considered as hallmarks of literacy. Consequently, student performance in “Composition” was and still is a basic criterion for the evaluation of the language competence of the young, for pinpointing and lamenting the decline of the Greek language, etc. Indeed, the novel pejorative term “lexipenia” was coined back in 1985 as it turned out that several of the candidates did not know the meanings of the (rather archaic and thus more scholarly-sounding) words “prosperity” and “succour” (see Christides, 1999), which led to the media and public opinion bemoaning the language deficit of the young (note that in this popular view language competence is treated as equivalent to vocabulary knowledge).

From 2000 onwards the exam paper has a new structure; it examines:

- reading comprehension of a “Reference Text” through providing paragraph titles, analysing paragraph structure, writing a summary, spotting mechanisms of cohesion such as conjunctions, adverbs, etc.
- vocabulary (synonyms, antonyms)
- the writing of an “argumentative” text based on the Reference Text.

(for examples from the 2014 essay, see Appendix 1)

According to the relevant article of the Government Gazette,

[...] Students are asked to produce a text of their own, within a communicative frame, in relation to the reference text, in which they comment on or are critical towards points raised in that text, they refute its positions or present their own views, providing adequate arguments in support. The students’ text has the form of an argumentative text (a public speech, a letter, an article) and must be between 300 and 350 words.

(Government Gazette, 24.05.2019, 19437)

Despite the purported “communicative shift”, the examination of exam papers, including “Composition” topics from 2000 onwards, an example of which was presented above, shows that in essence, nothing has changed in terms of the evaluation of writing (cf. Tsiplakou & Tzagari, 2021). Criticism can be summarised as follows:

There is a mismatch between the content and format of the exam questions/topics and the objectives of critical literacy. The examination aims at the prescriptively “correct” production of a single pseudo-genre, in fact a quasi-philosophical essay (known as “Composition of Ideas” in previous decades) disguised as a “letter to the press” or a “public speech”, with essentially predetermined, expected content and ideological orientation. It is quite obvious that a pseudo-genre is required, as there is no real communicative situation, the social characteristics of the speaker/writer and the audience are not defined, nor is the purpose of the communication; the proposed “genres” are too general and too artificial to be meaningful (to mention only a few examples: an article written by a scientist and a media article of general interest, an article on politics or entertainment are, in fact, different genres; a public speech in the school context, a political speech or a scientific talk are also different genres; see also Michalis, 2020). The absence of these parameters leaves students in the dark as to the expected content and the expected ways of organising information and structuring arguments. The instructions state that an argumentative text is expected; but argumentative texts take different forms, depending on the genre: scientific argumentation is different from political, moral, emotive argumentation, etc. Consequently, the form of language differs: scientific discourse, public political discourse or personal experiential discourse are linguistically different. None of the above are specified in the instructions. The framework remains pseudo-communicative while in essence a “Composition of Ideas” in the spirit of traditional school literacy is expected. Concomitantly, a uniform, prescriptively “correct”, “formal” stylistic level is expected. As was mentioned above, autonomous literacy goes hand in hand with hegemonic and standard language ideologies, and the Panhellenic examinations are a case in point.

### 3. The case study

#### 3.1 *The aim and the research questions*

The case study that we will present below aims to investigate the washback effect of the Greek Language component of the Panhellenic examinations on the language competence and literacy learning of students. Therefore, the research question that guides our investigation is: ‘Does teaching to the test (in this case the Greek Language exam of the Panhellenic examinations) hone the skills targeted? And if yes, in what ways? Theoretically, one could argue that even the cultivation of autonomous literacy, although only covertly stated, of a single school genre, the “Composition”, of a single text type (argumentative text) and of a single register / stylistic level (formal), can potentially have beneficial, albeit somewhat one-sided, effects on literacy learning. It is therefore interesting to examine whether the students,

who are taught intensively with these objectives in mind, show improvement in their language performance in terms of what is assessed and evaluated positively in the Panhellenic examinations, i.e., a single genre, standard, formal language etc. - although these objectives are not clearly stated or compared and contrasted with other types of language and other genres, so metalinguistic awareness is not developed.

For the purposes of our study, 161 practice papers in “Composition” produced by 12 senior students were collected and two subsets of these were analysed (for results of a pilot analysis of the first set of papers see Tsiplakou & Tsagari, 2021). The papers were produced by students of a private tutoring institute in a city in Northern Greece. Informed consent was obtained by those involved and the scripts were anonymised and typed (keeping spelling and other mistakes). We focused on students whose papers we had at our disposal from the beginning to the end of the year. The teaching methods and the profiles of the participants are not examined in the present study, which focuses exclusively on the quality of the texts produced under conditions of intensive “teaching to the test” for the purposes of the exam. We assessed whether there was any improvement from the beginning to the end of the year, following intensive teaching that cultivated specific contents and ways of textual organisation and aimed at the acquisition of a “rich” vocabulary (including many learned elements) and the honing of writing in a “formal” style, which in essence translates into archaic morphology, complex syntax featuring extensive subordination, nominalisation, extensive use of passive voice, archaic-sounding words or expressions etc., as indexicals of a “learned”, elaborate, literate style).

A quantitative and qualitative investigation was carried out through evaluations of 8 essays by 4 focal students; 4 of the papers were written at the beginning of the school year and 4 at the end, and we made sure that each set of papers was on the same topic in order to avoid possible distorting effects as a result of differences in the content: the practice test question in set 1 (beginning of the year) was to write a speech on the issue of violence in contemporary societies and the question in set 2 (end of the year) was to write a newspaper article on the causes of racism. The evaluations were carried out by nine experienced raters from various places in Greece, 4 men and 5 women, all teaching at Greek public schools and each with over 20 years of teaching experience as well as experience in preparing students for the Panhellenic examinations and in the grading of the Greek Language paper (“Composition”). It needs to be mentioned that most of our raters hold graduate degrees: four hold PhDs and two are PhD candidates, all in education-related areas. We used the rubric which is currently used in the Panhellenic examinations (Ministry of Education and Religions (MoE), Instructions, 135019/03-09-2019). The raters evaluated the papers on a scale of 1-5 regarding (a) content (b) text and paragraph organisation, (c) language. A few modifications were made to the official rubric. For example, “consistent use of [...] style in the greatest part of the text”, which, oddly, appears under “content” in the MoE instructions, was rephrased as “stylistic appropriateness” and moved under “Language” in our instructions. Also “breadth and precision of semantic elements” was changed to the more intelligible “breadth and precision of vocabulary”.

Below are the collective results of the quantitative evaluation:

PAPER	RATER	STUDENT 1	STUDENT 2	STUDENT 3	STUDENT 4	AVERAGE GRADE
1	1	3	3.33	1.66	2.33	2.58
	2	3	3	3.66	3.33	3.25
	3	3.33	3	2	2	2.58
	4	3	3	2.33	1.66	2.50
	5	1.66	1.66	1.66	1.66	1.66
	6	3	2.66	2.66	2.33	2.66
	7	1.66	2.33	1.33	1.33	1.66
	8	3.33	3.66	2.66	3.33	3.25
	9	1.66	2.66	1.66	2	2.16
	<b>TOTAL</b>					<b>2.48</b>
PAPER	RATER	STUDENT 1	STUDENT 2	STUDENT 3	STUDENT 4	AVERAGE GRADE
2	1	1.66	4	3.33	2.33	2.83
	2	2.33	3	2.33	2.33	2.50
	3	3	3	2	3	2.75
	4	3	2	2.33	4.33	3.16
	5	1.33	1.33	1.33	1.33	1.33
	6	3.33	4	2.66	3	3.25
	7	2.33	3	1.33	2.33	2.25
	8	3	3.66	3	3.66	3.25
	9	1.66	2.66	1.66	3	2.25
	<b>TOTAL</b>					<b>2.62</b>

Table 6. Average grades per rater / student and total average

An interesting result was that the evaluators did not rate the “Compositions” written at the end of the year as significantly better (in fact some were rated as worse), which shows that despite “teaching to the test” — or perhaps because of it — there was no significant improvement.

Table 7 presents the results per evaluated area (content, text organisation, language):

PAPER	AREA	AVERAGE GRADE
1	Content	2.61
	Text organisation	2.41
	Language	2.30
PAPER	AREA	AVERAGE GRADE
2	Content	2.81
	Text organisation	2.61
	Language	2.41

Table 7. Average grades per area

As the results indicate, there was only very little improvement in the areas assessed, with the least improvement having taken place in language. As regards the qualitative findings, raters pointed out that the spelling mistakes in the papers persist; sometimes even the same ones are repeated in the end of the year paper.

*ποιο “more”, συνδιασμός “combination”*

(Student A, Paper 1 & Paper 2)

παρείσφιση “infiltration”

(Student B, Paper 1 & Paper 2)

The raters also remarked on the erroneous use of “learned” vocabulary (e.g. μεταλλαχθεί “mutated” in lieu of simpler, more accurate verbs, such as στραφεί “shifted”; αφομοιώνονται “are assimilated” probably in lieu of the somewhat similar-sounding αφιερώνονται “devote themselves”):

*Με την πάροδο του χρόνου ο άνθρωπος έχει **μεταλλαχθεί** από την αλληλεγγύη και την συμπόνια στον φθόνο στον ατομικισμό καις την βία.*

With the passing of time man has **mutated** from solidarity and compassion to envy, individualism and violence.

(Student A, Paper 1)

*Ποιο συγκεκριμένα πολλά άτομα και κοινωνικές ομάδες **αφομοιώνονται** σε έναν αδιάλειπτο σκληρό αγώνα για να επιβάλλουν την θέληση και τα συμφεροντα τους.*

More specifically, many people and social groups are **assimilated** in a constant harsh struggle to impose their will and their interests.

(Student A, Paper 2)

Grammatical mistakes persevere even in practice papers from the end of the year:

*Οι διαρκώς αυξανόμενες απαιτήσεις των ανεπτυγμένα οικονομικά κρατών, πυροδοτεί εξεγέρσεις στα κράτη του τρίτου κόσμου, τα οποία, συχνά παρασυρόμενα από τη φτώχεια και στην συνέχεια, επικρατούν στις δικές τους περιοχές.*

The constantly increasing demands of the financially developed states triggers uprisings in third world states that, often carried away by poverty and subsequently, take over in their own territories.

(Student D, Paper 2)

The raters also remarked on the absence of coherence and cohesion and semantically irrelevant content:



*Η αθρῶα μετακίνηση των ανθρώπων στον αστικό χώρο, προετοιμάζει το έδαφος ὡστε οι πόλεις να μετατραπούν σε ἀρένες βίας. Με αυτόν τον τρόπο, ἄρχισε ο ἄνθρωπος να εγκλωβίζεται στους τέσσερις τοίχους του διαμερισματός του. Καλλιεργήθηκε στον ἄνθρωπο ο φόβος για τον ἄλλο και με αυτόν τον τρόπο ο ἄνθρωπος εκφραζόταν βίαια. Ο ἄνθρωπος ἔχασε το ἀνθρώπινο κομμάτι του και ἄρχισε να λειτουργεῖ μηχανικά. Μετατράπηκε λοιπόν ο ἄνθρωπος σε ἕναν ἀπλό ἀριθμό, ἀδιαφορώντας για την ζωή του συνανθρώπου.*

The massive movement of people to the urban space prepares the ground for cities to be transformed into arenas of violence. In this way, man has started to enclose himself within the four walls of his apartment. The fear for the other was cultivated in man and in this way man expressed himself violently. Man lost his human side and started functioning mechanically. Therefore, man was transformed into a plain number, being indifferent to the life of his fellow man.

(Student C, Paper 1)

The raters also pointed out that the absence of semantic coherence goes hand in hand with low-quality argumentation:

*Επίσης βιαιες επιθέσεις δημιουργούνται ἀναμεσα στις ισχυρες πόλεις εναντίων των ἀνήξερων πολιτων μονο και μονο για να πλουτίσουν οι βιομηχανίες που εχουν ὡς εμπόρευμα τα ὄπλα. Η ἀκομα καλήτερα η χρηματοδότηση τρομοκρατικών ομάδων και οργανώσεων για την επίτευξη πολιτικών και οικονομικών στόχων ἀπό διεθνείς παράγοντες. Με ἀποτέλεσμα να δημιουργούνται πολίτες οι οποιοι νιώθουν ἀποστάτευτοι και ἀβοήθητοι, με συνέπεια να οδηγούνται σε χειραγώγηση ἀπό του ισχυρούς. Ελπίζοντας για ενα καλύτερο μέλλον.*

Also, violent attacks are created among powerful cities against ignorant citizens only in order for arm industries to become rich. Or even better the funding of terrorist groups and organisations by international agents in order to achieve political and financial goals. The result being that citizens are created who feel unprotected and helpless, being led into manipulation by the powerful as a result. Hoping for a better future.

(Student A, Paper 1)

Some of the most recurrent motifs in the raters' comments involve (see also Appendix 2 for additional raters' comments):

- (i) the perseverance of grammatical and spelling mistakes;

- (ii) the memorisation and inappropriate use of “learned”, archaic, stilted vocabulary; the lack of understanding of the semantics (and syntax) of the vocabulary featured very prominently in the comments;
- (iii) the memorisation of “ready-made” content:

*Τα παιδιά θεωρούν ότι μαθαίνοντας παπαγαλία κάποιες φράσεις ή περιόδους μπορούν επαρκώς να αναπτύξουν ένα θέμα που θα τους ζητηθεί [...] Κατά ένα μεγάλο ποσοστό χρησιμοποίησαν κατά λέξη και ατάκτως ερριμμένες ιδέες που διαγραμματικά τους δίνονται ως ευαγγέλιο.*

Kids think that memorizing some phrases and periods will help them discuss the essay topic adequately [...] A large percentage used verbatim a mishmash of ideas given to them [by shadow educators] in the form of bullet points as though these were the Bible.

- (iv) problems with structuring arguments;
- (v) problems with structuring arguments and text organisation;
- (vi) inability to produce the required genre; tellingly, raters attribute this to the pseudo-communicative nature of the writing task:

*Στην αρχή πάντως φαίνεται πως προσπαθεί να γράψει άρθρο. Πολύ γρήγορα χάνεται.*

At first, at least, s/he seems to be trying to write an article. This is lost very quickly.

*Σε καμία περίπτωση δεν είναι ομιλία.*

There is no way this is a speech.

*Παραμένει περισσότερο «εκθεσιακό» και λιγότερο άρθρο (αυτό στην πράξη δικαιολογείται από τον ψευδοεπικοινωνιακό χαρακτήρα των εξετάσεων).*

It still is more of a “composition” and less of an article (this is in fact accounted for by the pseudo-communicative nature of the exams).

- (vii) attempts at erudition and stylistic sophistication that backfire:

*[...] αποτυχημένη προσπάθεια εκφραστικής επιτήδευσης που καταλήγει σε μαπαρούφες.*

[...] a failed attempt at stylistic sophistication that results in gibberish.

Interestingly, even when the raters observe improvement in the texts, they still see them as exam papers rather than authentic language:

*Βλέπω πίσω από το κείμενο έναν τυποποιημένο υποψήφιο που διεκπεραιώνει «αυτό που θέλουν» και αναπαράγει ξένες σκέψεις με ξύλινο λόγο.*

Behind the text I can see a typical candidate who carries out “what they want” and reproduces someone else’s thoughts in stilted language.

*Λιγότερα τα συντακτικά λάθη. Λίγες οι ακατάληπτες λέξεις. Είμαι σίγουρη πως στις εξετάσεις θα έπαιρνε μεγάλο βαθμό. Γράφει με τον τρόπο που θέλουν πολλοί εξεταστές.*

There are fewer syntactic mistakes. Few incomprehensible words. I am sure that in the exams s/he would get a high grade. S/he writes the way many examiners want.

A quite telling motif that keeps appearing in the raters’ thorough and insightful comments is the unanimous recognition of the fact that the covert expectations of the evaluation system are detrimental to student literacy: authenticity and creativity are lacking, stilted language and unassimilated ideas predominate, half-baked memorisation of fixed answers and purportedly complex, erudite language is ultimately detrimental to literacy.

#### 4. Discussion and implications

The findings clearly indicate failure to achieve the goals of language teaching that is oriented towards high-stakes exams such as the Greek Language paper of the Panhellenic exams. The raters’ evaluations suggest that there was no real improvement in the language skills of the participants from the beginning to the end of the school year (e.g., in spelling, vocabulary or syntax); it is particularly interesting that the students did not improve in those areas and skills that are required and positively evaluated, despite intensive teaching. As mentioned above, underachievement can be attributed to a number of factors related to evaluation, teaching and the interaction between the two, mainly in the form of the strong washback effect of evaluation.

The evaluation criteria are general, minimal and vague (e.g., contextual, stylistic and lexical appropriateness, content relevance, grammatical correctness, the production of argumentative texts). However, the criteria that are covertly adopted promote the “correct” production of pseudo-genres with specific content, ideological orientation and style. The National Curricula promote “communicative appropriateness”, although this goal is stated quite vaguely and is undermined by the Curricula themselves. A “formal” or “learned” register or style is expected in the evaluation (indexed by “learned” vocabulary, archaic morphology, subordination in the syntax, complex expressions) and specific contents.

In summary, the failure can be argued to be an aspect of the result of the washback effect of the examination under study, as examination preparation aims at a very limited subset of language skills and these skills are cultivated in a decontextualized way and without critical inquiry and reflection. In the context of the autonomous literacy model, emphasis is placed on the ideological content of the writing and the production of a purportedly “formal” and erudite register / style as an indexical of the quality of the text and of a high level of literacy—and not on the cultivation of critical (meta)linguistic awareness.

The study raises the issue of the restructuring of the Greek Language paper of the Panhellenic language exams with special emphasis on the validity of the content of the exam (construct validity) and the avoidance of washback effects during exam preparation (cultivation of critical linguistic awareness, a broader range of topics, genres, and linguistic varieties, metalinguistic awareness, critical literacy). In order to avoid the negative consequences of the washback effect, it is necessary to hone language assessment literacy (Tsagari, 2020) in those directly involved, e.g., teachers, educational and evaluation policy designers, etc. (Vogt & Tsagari, 2014, Fulcher, 2012; Inbar-Lourie, 2016; Taylor, 2009, 2013). Vogt and Tsagari (2014, p. 377) refer to assessment literacy as “the ability to design, develop and critically evaluate tests and other assessment procedures, as well as the ability to monitor, evaluate, and grade assessments based on theoretical knowledge.” In future efforts to promote assessment literacy, assessment and evaluation should not be designed and administered according to overarching general constructs. Instead, they should be tailored to aspects of the teaching and assessment contexts and systems and the needs of the teachers and others involved in exam preparation and teaching. For example, primary school teachers should receive different training in assessment literacy than secondary or university teachers (Vogt, Tsagari & Spanoudis, 2020). Therefore, training programs should be designed according to the educational context of each country. In addition to carefully designed training programs, assessment literacy should be promoted through other means, such as online training platforms (see, e.g., the TALE project, <http://taleproject.eu>), (online) seminars and workshops, communities and groups of teachers and others, who will promote good practices in the field (Tsagari & Csépes, 2012). Again, all of these practices should reflect the needs of the various systems and stakeholders and build on the existing assessment and evaluation experiences of those involved.

## 5 Conclusions

In this paper we tried to address the issue of the washback effect of the Greek language paper of the Panhellenic examination on teaching and literacy learning at large. We discussed the (language) ideologies that drive teaching and assessment in the Greek education system, and showed how these are reflected in the content and structure of the national Greek language test for university admission. The case study presented set out to investigate whether some aspects of literacy, namely those promoted by the examination system, albeit with a strict autonomous literacy orientation, can in fact be honed through “teaching to the test”, i.e.

whether the assumed washback effect of the test may have some positive effects on literacy learning. The data from the case study indicate the opposite, thereby stressing the need for change in assessment and evaluation, for assessment literacy and for a drastic rethinking of literacy learning in this educational context.

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## APPENDIX I

### THE STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF A SAMPLE GREEK LANGUAGE TEST PAPER (2014)

2014 essay:

In order to better contextualise and understand the test questions, we provide a translated extract of the “Reference Text” (the translation is as faithful as possible to the original text; meaning ambiguities and other peculiarities reflect those of the original):

#### Extract from the “Reference Text”:

Η «ανθρωπιά» είναι μια λέξη του καιρού μας, ένας όρος κοινόχρηστος, ένα νόμισμα που κυκλοφορεί σ’ όλα τα χέρια, γιατί συμβαίνει η ανταλλακτική του αξία να είναι πολύ μεγάλη. Και με την «ανθρωπιά» εννοούμε, φυσικά, τη συμπόνια, τη συμμετοχή, με τον ένα ή τον άλλο τρόπο, στο πάθος του γείτονα. Και όχι μόνο του γείτονα. Του κάθε ανθρώπου. Άλλοτε χρησιμοποιούσαν τον όρο «ανθρωπισμός». Έλεγαν: «αυτός είναι μεγάλος ανθρωπιστής» και με τούτο εσήμαιναν μια προσωπικότητα που ξοδεύταν ολόκληρη για να κάμει το καλό. Ο Ντυνάν, για παράδειγμα, ο ιδρυτής του «Ερυθρού Σταυρού», υπήρξε ένας τέτοιος ανθρωπιστής. Πέρα απ’ ό,τι θα μπορούσε να ενδιαφέρει αποκλειστικά το άτομό του, εσυλλογίσθηκε τους ανθρώπους που έπασχαν, έξω από διάκριση φυλής και θρησκείας, «εν πολέμω και εν ειρήνη». Ο «ανθρωπιστής», ένας άνθρωπος με σπουδαίες ικανότητες, που αναλίσκεται με ειλικρίνεια, χωρίς υστεροβουλία, ακόμη και χωρίς τη θεμιτή, επιτέλους, από πολλές απόψεις, επιθυμία της υστεροφημίας, υπήρξε, για πολλούς αιώνες, ένα θαυμάσιο ιδανικό, που οι προγενέστεροι το επρόβαλλαν στους μεταγενέστερους. Ακόμη τότε η «ανθρωπιά», μολονότι δεν έπαυε να είναι κοινή απαίτηση, δεν είχε καταστήσει κοινόχρηστος όρος. Ήταν η σπάνια, η υψηλή παρουσία, όπου μόνο μερικές εκλεκτές φύσεις κατόρθωναν να φτάσουν. Και ακόμη, μια καθημερινή άσκηση που ο καθένας την επιθυμούσε για τον εαυτό του, θεωρώντας την αυτονόητο χρέος του, χωρίς να συλλογίζεται ότι θα μπορούσε και διαφορετικά να την αξιοποιήσει. Το γεγονός ότι η απαίτηση της «ανθρωπιάς» έχει γίνει κοινός τόπος σήμερα δεν είναι χωρίς ιδιαίτερη σημασία. Δείχνει πως η οικουμενική ψυχή αισθάνεται βαθύτερα την ταλαιπωρία του ανθρώπου και αναζητεί διέξοδο [...].

(I. M. Παναγιωτόπουλος, 1966)

#### Translation:

“Humanity” is a word of our time, a common term, a currency that circulates in all hands, because it happens that its exchange value is very high. And by “humanity” we mean, of course, compassion, participation, in one way or another, in the passion of the neighbour. And not just of the neighbour. Of every



human being. They used to use the term “humanism”. They said, "This is a great humanist," and by that they meant a personality that spent itself in doing good. Dunant, for example, the founder of the Red Cross, was one such humanist. Beyond what could be of exclusive interest to his person, he pondered on the people who suffered, irrespective of race and religion, “in war and in peace”. The “humanist”, a man of great abilities, who is consumed, in honesty, without the legitimate, in many respects, desire for posthumous fame, has been, for many centuries, a wonderful ideal, which was promoted by his predecessors, to the latter. Even then, “humanity”, although it was no longer a common requirement, had not become a common term. It was the rare, high presence that only a few exquisite natures could reach. And yet, a daily exercise that everyone wanted for himself, considering it his self-evident debt, without thinking that he could use it otherwise. The fact that the demand for “humanity” has become commonplace today is not without significance. It shows that the ecumenical soul feels the suffering of man deeper and seeks a way out. [...]

(I.M. Panagiotopoulos, 1966)

The Reading Comprehension exercises are as follows:

- A1. Write in your notebook the summary of the text (100-120 words)  
25 points
- B1. Develop the content of the following extract in a paragraph of 100-120 words:  
“Human greed, the thirst for a life of comfort, does not leave any space for noble feelings. More than that: noble feelings are considered passé.”  
10 points
- B2.a. Find two ways in which the first paragraph of the text is structured and justify your answer.  
6 points
- b. What meaning links are established by the following words?  
thus (paragraph 4)  
however (paragraph 6)  
4 points
- B3.a. Write a synonym for each of these words from the text.  
consumed, ecumenical, distortions, totally, well-being  
5 points

- B3.b. Write an antonym for each of these words from the text.  
commonplace, participation, self-cancelling, knowledge, incessant

5 points

- B4.a. Explain the use of quotation marks in the following cases:  
“he is a great humanist”  
“Red Cross”

2 points

- b. Find three metaphorical expressions in the text

3 points

Finally, writing is assessed as follows:

- Γ. Σε άρθρο σας, που θα δημοσιευτεί σε τοπική εφημερίδα, να αναφερθείτε σε φαινόμενα που αποδεικνύουν το έλλειμμα ανθρωπιάς στην εποχή μας, αλλά και σε δραστηριότητες, ατομικές και συλλογικές, που αποσκοπούν στον περιορισμό αυτού του ελλείμματος (500--600 λέξεις).

Μονάδες: 40

- C. Write an article, to be published in a local newspaper, referring to phenomena that prove the lack of humanity in our time, but also to activities, individual and collective, aimed at reducing this deficit.

40 points

## APPENDIX 2

### ADDITIONAL RATER COMMENTS

*Τα παιδιά θεωρούν ότι μαθαίνοντας παπαγαλία κάποιες φράσεις ή περιόδους μπορούν επαρκώς να αναπτύξουν ένα θέμα που θα τους ζητηθεί [...] Κατά ένα μεγάλο ποσοστό χρησιμοποίησαν κατά λέξη και ατάκτως ερριμμένες ιδέες που διαγραμματικά τους δίνονται ως ευαγγέλιο.*

Kids think that memorising some words and phrases will help them discuss the essay topic adequately [...] A large percentage used verbatim a mishmash of ideas given to them [by shadow educators] in the form of bullet points as though these were the Bible.

*Γενικά, επίσης, τις περισσότερες φορές δεν γνωρίζουν πώς να αξιοποιήσουν το ξύλινο λεξιλόγιο που τους υπαγορεύουν, ούτε ως προς την σημασία του ούτε όμως και ως προς τη συντακτική του χρήση.*

Also, overall, they do not know how to capitalise on the stilted vocabulary dictated to them, neither in terms of meaning nor in terms of syntax.

*ΠΟΛΛΑ ορθογραφικά λάθη! Απούσα στίξη! Συνοχή μεταξύ των ιδεών τους ανεπαρκής και συχνά άστοχη.*

LOTS OF spelling mistakes! Punctuation is absent! Cohesion among ideas is inadequate, frequently missing the point.

*Η δόμηση του επιχειρήματος ή ακόμη και η έννοια του επιχειρήματος τούς είναι παντελώς άγνωστη. Αυτό έχει ως αποτέλεσμα και την προβληματική δομή της παραγράφου. Άλλα λέει η θεματική πρόταση άλλα οι λεπτομέρειες...*

Structuring an argument, or even the concept of argument, seems to be completely unknown. This results in problematic paragraph structure. The thematic sentence is about something other than the details...

*Ατυχής οργάνωση, αναφομοίωτες ιδέες, αποτυχημένη προσπάθεια εκφραστικής επιτήδευσης που καταλήγει σε μπαρούφες.*

Unfortunate organisation, unassimilated ideas, failed attempt at stylistic sophistication that results in gibberish.

*Του λείπει η αυθεντικότητα ενός μαθητικού κειμένου.*

It lacks the authenticity of a student text.

*Έχω την αίσθηση πως πρόκειται για ιδέες που δεν έχει αφομοιώσει, αλλά έχει αποστηθίσει. Χρησιμοποιεί λέξεις των οποίων τη σημασία αγνοεί και για αυτό δεν τις εντάσσει στο σωστό γλωσσικό περιβάλλον. Οι διαρθρωτικές λέξεις υπάρχουν για εντυπωσιασμό και δεν ανταποκρίνονται στα νοήματα. Το κείμενο δεν είναι ούτε πληροφοριακό ούτε πειστικό. Απουσιάζει η προσωπική οπτική.*

I have the feeling that these are ideas that s/he has not assimilated but memorised. S/he uses words whose meaning s/he ignores and therefore does not place them in the right linguistic context. Linking words exist in order to make an impression and do not correspond to actual meanings. The text is neither informative nor convincing. The personal perspective is absent.

*Στην αρχή πάντως φαίνεται πως προσπαθεί να γράψει άρθρο. Πολύ γρήγορα χάνεται.*

At first, at least, s/he seems to be trying to write an article. This is lost very quickly.

*Υπάρχουν ιδέες και κάποια επιχειρηματολογία την οποία πάλι φαίνεται πως έχει προσπαθήσει να αποστηθίσει. Πολλές λέξεις είναι ανύπαρκτες.*

There are ideas and some arguments that s/he again seems to have tried to memorise. Many words are non-existent.

#### **Rater comments focusing on purported improvement in literacy skills:**

*Βλέπω πίσω από το κείμενο έναν τυποποιημένο υποψήφιο που διεκπεραιώνει «αυτό που θέλουν» και αναπαράγει ξένες σκέψεις με ξύλινο λόγο.*

Behind the text I can see a typical candidate who carries out “what they want” and reproduces someone else’s thoughts in stilted language.

*Σε καμία περίπτωση δεν είναι ομιλία. Λιγότερα τα συντακτικά λάθη. Λίγες οι ακατάληπτες λέξεις. Είμαι σίγουρη πως στις εξετάσεις θα έπαιρνε μεγάλο βαθμό. Γράφει με τον τρόπο που θέλουν πολλοί εξεταστές.*

There is no way this is a speech. There are fewer syntactic mistakes. Few incomprehensible words. I am sure that in the exams s/he would get a high grade. S/he writes the way many examiners want.

*Παραμένει περισσότερο «εκθεσιακό» και λιγότερο άρθρο (αυτό στην πράξη δικαιολογείται από το ψευδοεπικοινωνιακό χαρακτήρα των εξετάσεων).*

It still is more of a “composition” and less of an article (this is in fact accounted for by the pseudo-communicative nature of the exams).

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