

The role of foreign languages in the mobility journey of young Greeks

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Abstract

The role of foreign languages at the participation of young Greeks at the European mobility programs is the main subject of this communication. The target audience is former participants of the mobility programs (Erasmus , Lifelong Learning Program, Erasmus +). This research is characterized primarily as a qualitative study, with certain features of a quantitative study. According to our results, foreign languages have versatile functions for the participation in a mobility program: they can be simultaneously a condition and a reason, at the same time as they are an essential effect of mobility. Also, mastery of foreign languages is mandatory in order to be able to participate in mobility programs. Likewise, participants decide to take part at a mobility program and to move to another country in order to practice at least one foreign language or learn a new one. The analysis of the corpus reveals that the choice to learn a foreign language is determined by different factors and based on various motivations. Finally, language policy can also play an important role and have an impact on the linguistic repertoire of individuals. Policy choices can thus create the framework for learning a foreign language and determine the host country of the mobility.

Keywords: mobility program, language acquisition, language policy

Introduction

The present communication focuses on the role of foreign languages at the participation of young Greeks at the European mobility programs.

European mobility programs were the target subject in many studies. Teichler's work (2015) for example has shown that the motivations for organized mobility are mainly linguistic, academic, professional, socio-cultural and personal. The four major advantages of temporary study abroad are academic, cultural, linguistic and professional advantages. Teichler also found out that students who have benefited from an international mobility experience can have visible and less visible effects. We aim to study the essential role of foreign languages in the participation at the European mobility programs.

Methods and materials

In order to investigate the importance of foreign language at the European mobility program, we opted for an interdisciplinary research. The topics and the methods relate to social sciences, linguistics, and educational sciences. The

two axes of our reflection are the mastery of foreign languages, on the one hand, and the European mobility programs, on the other.

The target audience is made up of former participants in the following mobility programs: Erasmus (1987- 2013), Lifelong Learning Programs (2007-2013), Erasmus + (2014-2020) and European Voluntary Service (EVS) (1996-2013, 2014-2020). These programs are an expression of the language policy applied at European level and they offered the ideal field to study multiple topics.

The methodology used for this research is a mixed method. As Hesse-Biber (2010) says it is “a research design that uses both quantitative and qualitative data to answer a particular question or set of questions”. In this case, quantitative and qualitative methodology is used in order to collect and analyse data.

As for the data collection, our corpus is constructed with 164 responses to a questionnaire, 54 Success stories (published on the official IKY website) and 12 semi-structured interviews. As for the analysis, we applied descriptive statistics and content analysis.

Results

The nature of the European mobility programs demands a minimum language proficiency. It was not so strange to see that the young Greek participants have a multilingual language profile (Figure 1) but also the omnipresence of the English language. During the mobility and mostly in an academic setting, English is seen as *Lingua Franca* between speakers of different languages, by choice or by compulsion (JENKINS, 2011).

The foreign languages have versatile functions ; they can be simultaneously a condition and a reason, at the same time as they are an essential effect of mobility. Also, fluency in foreign languages is compulsory in order to be able to participate in the mobility. Likewise, participants move to another country in order to practice at least one foreign language or learn a new one. Language skills play a constitutive role in participation in mobility programs as they are the condition, the reason, the purpose, the motive and the result of the mobility.

As for the language acquisition, policy choices at different levels and in different areas can thus create the framework for learning a foreign language and determine the host country of the mobility. Our data analysis showed that 4 different policies can determine the language acquisition of a foreign language.

Finally, we understand that foreign language acquisition and mobility are correlated ; the Greek participants started with the learning procedure of one or two languages. The desire to mobility lead the to participate in an European mobility program: Mobility allows participants to acquire the ability to integrate multicultural environments, to coexist and work with people from different

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cultures, practice foreign language, have an European or international experience and finally improve a foreign language or learn a new one.

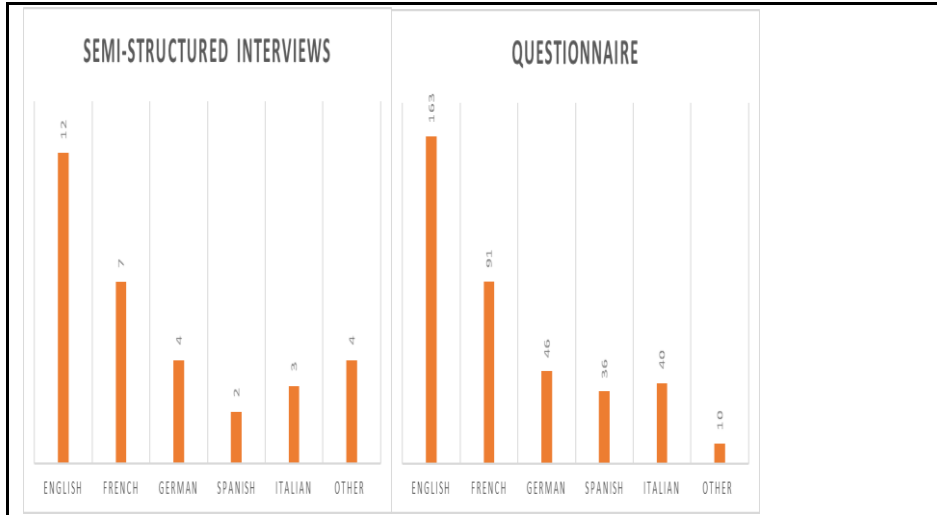


Figure 1. The linguistic skills of the informants.

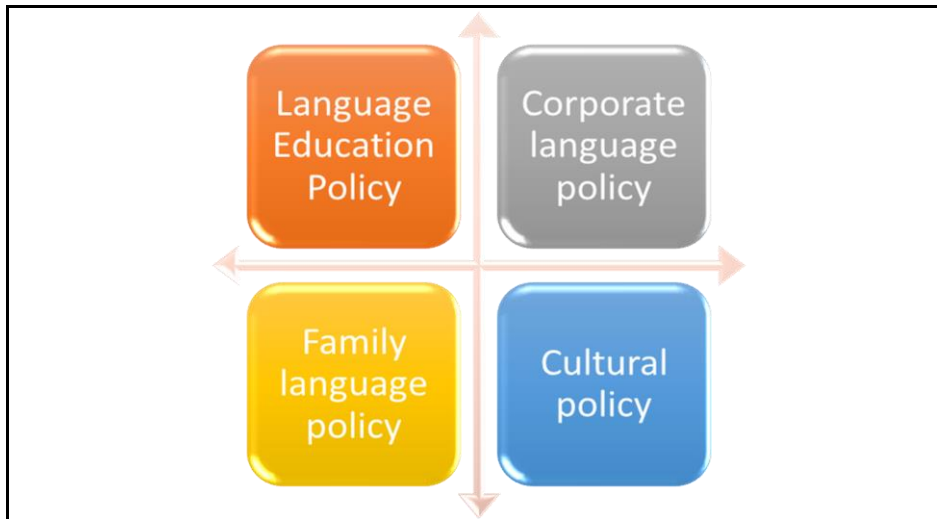


Figure 2. The policies that influence language acquisition.

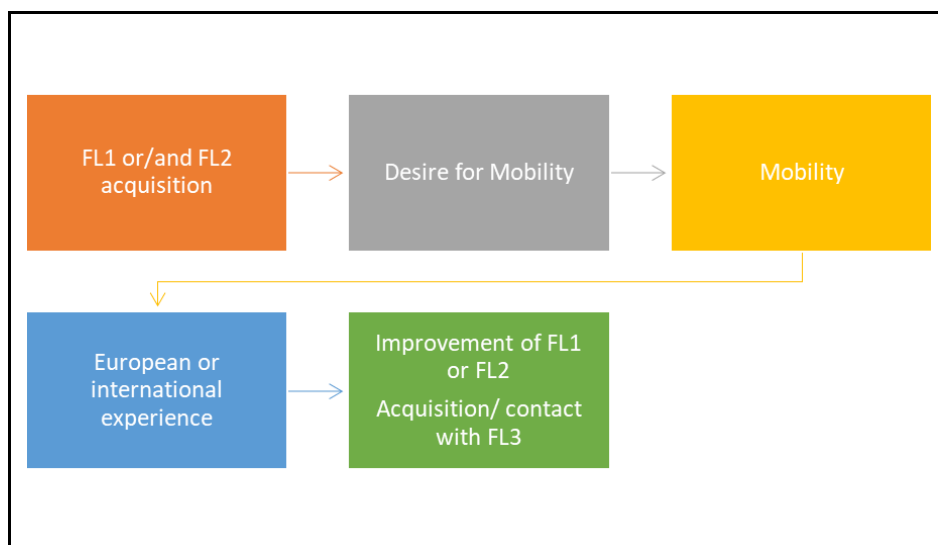


Figure 3. Language acquisition via the European mobility programs.

Conclusions

To conclude, we understand that mobility and plurilingualism have an “action-reaction” type relationship. Language skills are the main strength of mobility. Whether mobility concerns students or employees, it is based on the language skills of individuals. Language policy determines the linguistic repertoire of participants. And, the choice of mobility is closely linked to the linguistic repertoire of the individual, which determines the host country of the mobility.

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