Greek heritage language teachers as emergency grassroots policy makers: reconciling learner centred responses with textbook heavy pedagogies during COVID-19 lockdown

Vally Lytra

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Greek heritage language teachers as emergency grassroots policy makers: reconciling learner centred responses with textbook heavy pedagogies during COVID-19 lockdown

Vally Lytra 🄳

Centre for Language, Culture and Learning, Department of Educational Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London, London, UK

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the paucity of research on policy agents' responses to the shift to teaching online during the first lockdown in heritage language education and pedagogy. Collected in the context of a small-scale exploratory study, it focuses on the reflective accounts of a group of heritage language teachers in a Greek school in francophone Switzerland. The paper builds on a translingual and transcultural orientation to language and language education (Lytra et al., 2022, Liberating Language Education. Multilingual Matters) and investigates language teachers' emergency grassroots policy making through a critical ethnographic lens (Martin-Jones & da Costa Cabral, 2018, The critical ethnographic turn in research on language policy and planning. In J. W. Tollefson, & M. Pérez-Milans (Eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Language Policy and Planning (pp. 71–92). Oxford University Press). It demonstrates how teachers leveraged children's developing digital abilities and expanded their semiotic repertoires. Concerned with delivering the curriculum, meeting language and literacy objectives and managing parental expectations, teachers simultaneously exploited children's familiarity with established textbook heavy pedagogies which they adapted to different degrees. The acknowledgement and incorporation of children's digital abilities, and experiences to support Greek language learning did not encompass an integrative multimodal and multilingual approach.

Introduction

On 16 March 2020, all schools in Switzerland were forced to close and several shifted to different forms of instruction online. Overnight Greek heritage schools and their teachers were called to rethink and redesign their pedagogy to sustain Greek language and culture learning and maintain a sense of connection and community with the children and their families during this period of confinement (from mid-March to the end of June 2020).

CONTACT Vally Lytra ✉ v.lytra@gold.ac.uk 🏠 Centre for Language, Culture and Learning, Department of Educational Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London, New Cross, London SE14 6NW, UK

This paper focuses on the perspectives of Greek heritage language teachers in a Greek heritage school in francophone Switzerland and examines their pedagogic responses when they were forced to shift to teaching online during the first lockdown. The teachers' accounts highlight the role of local actors in navigating pedagogic practice under conditions of emergency grassroots policy making. They extend an emergent body of studies that have documented a range of policy agents' responses to the digital mediation of teaching and learning and policy processes across levels. Hargreaves and Fullan (2020) reported on the flexibility and inventiveness of teachers, schools, and national and local governments to respond to children's unequal access to digital infrastructure and resources. Other studies have examined the teachers' pedagogic practices. Hodges et al. (2020) drew an important distinction between 'well-planned online learning experiences' that require 'careful instructional design and planning' and 'emergency remote teaching' that denotes 'a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances' (Hodges et al., 2020; see also Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). These scholars have argued that teaching online during the pandemic was predominantly viewed as a temporary solution and very few educational systems had a well-designed and implemented online provision prior to the pandemic on which they could build their pedagogy. Critiques of pedagogic responses centred on teachers often utilising digital platforms and resources to facilitate communication with students and transmit content rather than leveraging students' existing digital knowledge and expertise to support interaction and learning (Chik & Benson, 2021). In a similar vein, Fullan et al. (2020) stressed that pedagogic practice remained in many cases teacher-centred, and the teachers' focus was on ensuring the delivery of the curriculum. Lim (2020), however, emphasised that teaching online had the potential to support more inclusive and learner centred pedagogies and democratise knowledge. While a body of work on policy agents' responses to teaching online during the COVID-19 lockdown has emerged worldwide, there is a paucity of research on heritage language education and pedagogy. Existing studies have investigated head teachers' measures to support learning online in Polish complementary schools in the UK (Young & White, 2022) and extend the heritage schools' activities as civil society organisations through, for instance, increasing networking online and parental involvement in children's learning (White & Young, 2022). Afreen and Norton (2021) has examined how teachers in a community-based Bangla school in Canada transitioned from in-person to online teaching during the pandemic focusing on teacher collaboration and connecting with the broader Bengali community.

This paper contributes to research on heritage language education and pedagogy during the temporary shift to teaching online in two ways: firstly, it explores local actors' voices and experiences as they interacted with local and transnational conditions that underpinned teaching online. Greek heritage language education has increasingly become decentralised, fragmented, and polycentric (Lytra, 2019). These conditions unsettle top-down linear conceptualisation of educational policy. They shift analytical attention to grassroots efforts and highlight the role of heritage language teachers in emergency grassroots policy making, individually and collectively. Secondly, the paper broadens the scope of inquiry to teaching online in Greek heritage schools which have hitherto remained unexamined. It responds to urgent calls in sociolinguistics, applied linguistics and language education 'to engage with local experiences and voices' (Makoni & Severo, 2022). Indeed, significantly

less attention has been paid to a wider range of heritage language schools and their teachers beyond English-dominant countries and to smaller language communities and languages perceived as 'less prestigious' worldwide. The teachers' reflective accounts presented in this paper were collected in the context of a small-scale exploratory study of teachers and parents' experiences with teaching and learning online in Greek heritage schools in Switzerland supplemented by observations, online informal conversations and email exchanges and a collection of relevant documentary data pertaining to school life during the first lockdown. Conceptually, the paper draws on a translingual and transcultural orientation to language and language pedagogy (Lytra et al., 2022) and examines heritage language teachers' emergency grassroots policy making through a critical ethnographic lens (Martin-Jones & da Costa Cabral, 2018). It asks: how did Greek heritage language teachers actively respond to the possibilities open to them from the temporary shift to teaching online? It demonstrates how teachers mobilised divergent co-existent pedagogic practices that sought to reconcile more learner centred responses that recognised and leveraged children's developing digital resources and abilities with established textbook heavy pedagogies.

Greek heritage schools in Switzerland

Switzerland is governed under a federal system and each Canton is mainly responsible for creating and implementing its educational policy. Heritage language schools in Switzerland are commonly community-based grassroots, self-funded initiatives which depend on volunteer labour. Their precarious position was further accentuated during the pandemic when several schools were forced to close completely; some failed to reopen while others saw their number of students dramatically drop. Against this broader educational policy context, Greek heritage language schools in Switzerland have been operating under conditions of rapid change tethered to shifting socioeconomic and institutional circumstances and processes of large-scale migration. In late 2009, Greece was severely hit by the financial crisis and the recession. One of the consequences of the strict austerity measures and structural reforms imposed by the European Union was the reconfiguration of the provision for Greek language education abroad, its goals, agents, and allocated resources by the Greek state. This resulted in the Greek state and its educational authorities halting or substantially reducing the administrative and financial support and pedagogical oversight of many Greek heritage schools by limiting teacher secondments, and the delivery of textbooks and other teaching materials and resources free of charge (Stylou, 2019).

In Switzerland, these national educational policy changes have led to the rapid privatisation, decentralisation and fragmentation of Greek heritage language education post 2011. Although local historical and socio-cultural contexts within which Greek heritage schools operate differ significantly within and across national borders (see studies in Damanakis et al., 2014; Panagiotopoulou et al., 2019), what seems to be emerging in Switzerland at least is the administrative and financial withdrawal of the Greek state and a contraction of its role as an active policy agent locally (Lytra, 2019). These policy changes have signalled the pre-eminence of grassroots efforts and local social actors and have transformed Greek heritage language teachers into grassroots policy actors. Operating outside centralised educational policy structures, teachers have come to play

an ever-increasing agentive role in (re)-defining the vision, ideology, and practice of Greek heritage languages schools (Karatsareas, 2021a, 2021b; Lytra, 2022; Lytra et al., 2023). Lockdown and the temporary shift to teaching online underscored their central role in emergency grassroots policy making. In the absence of policy guidance, support, and material resources from the Greek and Swiss states, teachers responded rapidly and decisively to school closures in Switzerland in mid-March 2020. Operating independently allowed teachers to exhibit initiative and flexibility and shift within days to various forms of teaching online. This shift elicited a range of divergent co-existent pedagogic responses which will be explored in the following sections.

Theoretical perspectives

To understand heritage language teachers' pedagogic responses to the temporary shift to teaching online, this paper is guided by a translingual and transcultural orientation to language and language pedagogy (Lytra et al., 2022). This orientation is grounded in a view of multilingualism as a resource (Ruiz, 1984) and as being at the centre of models of language and language education that aim to account for the enormous socio-political, economic, cultural, and linguistic changes associated with globalisation, migration, and other forms of (im)mobility, and the proliferation of digital technologies (Conteh & Meier, 2014; Douglas Fir Group, 2016). This view challenges scholars of multilingualism to critically interrogate dominant monolingual and prescriptivist ideologies, practices and policies and invest in educational approaches that valorise and strategically harness social actors' multilingual repertoires as pedagogic resources for teaching and learning (García et al., 2013; Van Avermaet et al., 2018). Underpinning this approach is a shift from a conceptualisation of languages, cultures, and identities as quantifiable, autonomous, and bounded systems, and from a language that one speaks to a focus on language 'as social practice, speakers as social actors and boundaries as products of social action' (Heller, 2007, p. 1). This understanding of speakers as social actors aligns with the focus of this paper on heritage language teachers as emergency grassroots policy makers. It simultaneously broadens conceptualisations of language to encompass social actors' full range of communicative repertoires, aesthetic resources, and multimodal practices. In so doing, it emphasises the multimodal, multisensory, aesthetic, personal and affective dimensions of language learning (Anderson & Macleroy, 2016; Kramsch, 2014). This expansive conceptualisation of language and language pedagogy castes analytical attention on the communicative corpus social actors have at their disposal (Leung & Scarino, 2016; Phipps, 2019; Ros i Sol, 2016). A translingual and transcultural orientation also chimes with a situated, social practice approach to language and pedagogy. It foregrounds how language hierarchies and social valuations linked to constellations of linguistic and other meaning-making resources contextualise and impact linguistic and other social practices and pedagogic choices, how they infuse legitimacy and authority to specific resources, practices, and choices but not to others (Heller & Martin-Jones, 2001; Rampton, 2020). In this paper, teachers and students' communicative corpus is understood as dynamic, fluid, and contingent. Their digital abilities, experiences and resources constituted an integral part of their evolving repertoires, which gained visibility and legitimacy as a response to the temporary shift to teaching online. Teachers and students selected, developed, and expanded their digital resources for

communication and learning and to cultivate new ways of being, seeing, feeling, and expressing in response to lockdown.

Scholarship in language in education policymaking also provided guidance in conceptualising heritage language teachers as emergency grassroots policy actors. In his discussion of community languages in late modernity, Li Wei (2018) identifies heritage language schools as 'agencies of grassroots actions from within the community' (p. 603). He argues that 'initiatives and actions from the grassroots are more powerful and can influence not only individuals' everyday behaviour, but also their beliefs and values, which will have a long-term impact' (p. 603). From a critical ethnographic perspective to language policy, Greek heritage schools can be understood as community-based educational and socio-political spaces where Greek heritage language teachers operate as grassroots social agents. They initiate, develop, negotiate, accept, or reject language policies and pedagogic practices at particular times and places. In this respect, heritage language teachers are conceptualised as agentive professionals (Menken & García, 2010) exercising possibilities for agency while operating at the intersection of competing discourses, spatio-temporal scales, and constraints (Heller, 2007). As Martin-Jones and da Costa Cabral (2018) argue, social actors need to be seen as 'socially positioned, and, at the same time showing agency, navigating constraints, and actively responding to the possibilities open to them in particular school and classroom sites' (p. 77). This approach 'understands agency and social structure as mutually constitutive' (Pérez-Milans, 2013, p. 77). In this paper, this socially embedded understanding of social actors provides a lens to examine the nexus of teachers' accounts of their pedagogic responses with social and institutional structures, discourses, and ideologies, circulating locally and transnationally. The investigation of this nexus can also reveal processes of continuation and change in pedagogic practice in Greek heritage schools during this period of disruption.

Existing research has demonstrated that Greek heritage schools must contend with a dominant ideological orientation to monoglossic and monodialectal language ideologies to bilingualism that compartmentalise and hierarchise linguistic and other semiotic resources. This orientation is often contrasted with the multilingual realities on the ground where linguistic resources are used flexibly often implicitly in classroom practice. Linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversities reflecting different biographical trajectories and meaning-making repertoires have complexified the iconic relationship between ethnolinguistic community and ethnic and linguistic inheritance (Hantzopoulos, 2013). These diversities in the UK, for example, have brought to the fore the hierarchisation of standardised and non-standardised varieties of Greek (Ioannidou et al., 2020) and the stigmatisation of the multilingual and multidialectal repertoires of students and their families with a Greek Cypriot background (Karatsareas, 2021a). Other studies have illustrated how students' meaning-making repertoires can be leveraged to support student agency, collaboration, and engagement (Charalambous, 2019, 2022), and enhance personal, intergenerational, and collective connections with the heritage language, culture, and identity (Charitonos, 2022). Heritage language teachers can renegotiate and rework Greek-only language policies by strategically using acts of translation as pedagogic practice (Lytra, 2022). They can modify their pedagogic practices and shift from textbook-based teaching (Pantazi, 2010), and articulate counter-discourses that recontextualise and resignify flexible language practices (Karatsareas, 2021b). These studies highlight teachers' pedagogic choices and practices that acknowledge the

heteroglossic nature of bilingualism (Bailey, 2007) where flexible and dynamic language practices and ideologies can also be strategically supported (Blackeldge & Creese, 2010; García et al., 2013). The present paper sheds further light on how teachers may navigate and reconcile competing pedagogic orientations under conditions of emergency grass-roots policy making.

Data collection and analysis

The teachers' reflective accounts presented in this paper emerged from a small-scale exploration of Greek heritage language teachers and parents' experiences with the temporary shift to online teaching and learning during the first lockdown conducted in July–August 2020. This study is part of a broader longitudinal (auto)ethnography examining processes of continuation and change in Greek language education in francophone Switzerland. I have been immersed in the rhythms of Greek school life since 2009, assuming a range of interconnected identities and roles as Greek school parent, leader, researcher-educator, and advocate. I am also co-founder of the Greek school featured in this paper and I have been supporting its collaborative teacher learning community that builds on teachers' knowledge and expertise to develop and expand from below the school's vision, curriculum and pedagogy and evaluate student progress. My sustained involvement with Greek heritage schools in Switzerland provided me with access to participants for this project and personal and professional insights into the experience of navigating the temporary shift to online teaching and learning during the first lockdown.

For this exploratory study, I collected a series of semi-structured reflective interviews with nine Greek heritage language teachers and eleven mothers whose children were attending Greek schools during the first lockdown in Switzerland. I recruited participants through personal contacts and snowball sampling which led to new introductions. All participants were part of the 'new' Greek migration who had moved to Switzerland from Greece and Cyprus post-2009 for personal and family reasons, in search of better professional opportunities or to attain further educational or professional qualifications. In this paper, I focus on the reflective accounts of three Greek heritage language teachers who taught at the school I had been supporting. The reason for selecting these three teachers was because they formed a well-established teacher learning community prior to the pandemic, and I had a wealth of observations concerning their pedagogic practices before, during and after lockdown to contextualise, understand and interpret their accounts through an ethnographic lens. Sophia, Maria EK and Maria C were committed and passionate educators. They did not wish to use pseudonyms and chose to be referred to by their first names. They were qualified Greek language teachers who had done their undergraduate studies at Greek Universities and held either postgraduate qualifications or had completed a further education training programme on Teaching Greek as a Second/Foreign Language. At the time of the interviews, they had been teaching at the Greek school from one to six years. Established in 2017, the Greek school was a grassroots initiative spearheaded by a group of parents and teachers. It served children aged between 2.5 and 16 years old who spoke a wealth of languages besides Greek: French, Spanish, German, Italian, and English. Most of the children had been born in francophone Switzerland or had moved there at a young age. French (the dominant societal language) was

the stronger language for the majority, and they had a wide spectrum of receptive and productive language abilities in Greek.

Reflective semi-structured interviews were chosen as the main method of data collection inspired by Oksoz and Smith's claim (2020) that processes of change and uncertainty during the pandemic can provide opportunities for reflection and self-reflection. An email outlining the project and requesting participants' consent to record the interview along with a set of guided questions adapted to teachers and parents respectively was sent prior to the interview to allow participants the opportunity to raise questions in advance. Ethical approval for the project was granted by Goldsmiths' Research Ethics & Integrity Sub-Committee. Participants were interviewed individually. Interviews were conducted and audio-recorded over ZOOM and stored on a password protected computer. The interviews lasted between an hour and a half and two hours and took place at the end of school year (July–August 2022). The interview questions aimed to capture participants' lived experience of online teaching and learning before, during and after the pandemic. Questions aimed for teachers inquired, for instance, about the use of digital tools and resources, the challenges they encountered and adaptations in pedagogy, learning objectives, and the curriculum they did as well as their efforts to sustain the school community culture and relations with students and parents. The interviews were conceived as open discussions, they were co-constructed and had a strong conversational quality. All reflective interviews were conducted in Greek, and I translated selected interview excepts to English for the purpose of this paper. Translations were checked with a proficient user of Greek and English for accuracy. The corpus of reflective interviews was supplemented by my observations in my research diary, online informal conversations and email exchanges and a collection of relevant documentary data pertaining to school life during the first lockdown (mid-March to end of June).

I employed thematic analysis, adopting Baun and Clarke's (2008) six-step approach to familiarise myself with the data, search for, review, define, and name themes. The themes discussed in this paper focus on teachers' pedagogic responses to the temporary shift to teaching online during the first lockdown. The themes emerged iteratively from multiple readings of the interview transcripts which I cross referred with my observations and other supplementary materials. In addition, the themes were informed by the emergent literature on teachers' responses to the digital mediation of teaching and learning during the COVID-19 lockdown. The analysis is framed by a translingual and transcultural orientation to language and pedagogy that takes an expansive view of language as an integral part of teachers and students' semiotic repertoires mobilised for teaching, learning and communication online. This orientation is combined with an understanding of heritage language teachers as emergency grassroots policy agents to shed light to the nexus of teachers' spatiotemporally situated accounts of their pedagogic responses with institutional structures, discourses and ideologies circulating locally and transnationally.

Findings

Recognising and leveraging children's digital resources, and expanding their semiotic repertoires

Despite the proliferation of open-source digital platforms and digital resources designed and published by educators as well as centrally by the Greek Ministry of Education and

Religious Affairs, and other public and private educational bodies, teachers had made only selective use of digital resources in their teaching prior to the pandemic. Teachers did not have access to the school's internet and the computers, projectors, and whiteboards in the classrooms they taught. They had to bring their own laptops and use the internet connection on their mobile phones. As a result, the use of digital platforms and resources in in-person teaching was used in an ad hoc manner to supplement the textbook and other print-based resources or for specific activities, such as in project work whenever additional digital resources were required. The temporary shift to teaching online propelled digital technologies from the periphery to the very centre of pedagogic practice. It unsettled established teaching routines and practices and brought to the fore unpredictability, and invention (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020). In the absence of any support or guidance from Greek and Swiss educational authorities, teachers positioned themselves as emergency grassroots policy makers. Exploiting the development of an established teacher learning community prior to the pandemic, they intensified their collaboration to adapt to teaching online flexibly and creatively and accommodate to students and parents' circumstances. Online lessons ranged from 30 min with the younger children (pre-kindergarten and kindergarten groups) to up to an hour (A1, A2 level groups) and an hour and a half with the older children (B1, B2 level groups). Teachers concentrated on the first part of the curriculum that focused on instructional and formal aspects of language and literacy learning and had been textbook heavy prior to the pandemic. The second part of the curriculum that took a distinctly cross-curricular approach to pedagogy was mainly delivered asynchronously.

While sustaining children's motivation and engagement remains a key concern of heritage language education (García et al., 2013; Lytra & Martin, 2010), this concern was exacerbated during lockdown due to the abrupt shift to teaching online. In response to my question about the changes teachers had to contend with, Sophia highlighted the significance of capturing and maintaining children's attention, motivation, and interest and the anxiety this concern triggered. She also voiced another concern about inequalities in digital abilities between teachers and children, recognising that many children's prior experience and expertise with digital media in some cases surpassed that of teachers.

Excerpt 1

Sophia: I think many things change, the interaction changes, the process. The way I experienced it [teaching online] one should, it requires, it seemed to me that it requires a lot more preparation. Given that children have a lot of contact with digital media, most of the times they know a lot more than we do. So, in my opinion, you need to find something to capture their attention. This made me quite anxious. Because I don't consider teaching online the same as teaching face-to-face. Because you can't have access to the blackboard to write on and you can't use the textbook all the time. It becomes boring, in other words, you don't have the children by your side to check if they are writing things down or if they are not, to make a joke, to tease them, even those who are a bit naughty, to tease their classmates. All this you will need to counterbalance with putting in place something else that is equally appealing.

Teachers adapted their pedagogic practice to recognise, leverage, and expand children's semiotic repertoires. Sophia, for instance, explained how she redesigned her language and literacy focused lessons online in ways that integrated the emergent

digital abilities of her kindergarten group aged 4–5 years old and exploited the resources (materials, objects) and mediators of learning (parents and siblings) readily available in the children's homes.

Excerpt 2

Sophia: During the lesson for each thematic unit, I presented some sheets, some photographs which we described. I asked various details to develop their oral abilities. Mostly I gave them a 'mission' in quotation marks for next time, to draw a picture and show it to us, to build a Lego construction. And the following week they would show us what they had made. Each child presented what they had done. We played various online games. I found some fairy tales online. I collated them into a digital book so that we could turn the pages and we could all read the book together. I shared the screen with them so they could see the book on their screens. In class I would hold the book up and show it to them. Now I did it with screen sharing. The other thing I did was that we did lots of arts and crafts together. In one of the thematic units, we learned the shapes. This was in collaboration with the parents of course. We found various objects in the house that resembled the shapes. Then together we cut the shapes from a worksheet that I had sent them, and the parents had printed out. Each child would cut out a shape and match the objects they had found in their home. Parental collaboration at this age was very important.

Sophia provided children with opportunities to develop and extend their digital repertoires and exploit their meaning-making resources for Greek language learning. Despite the young age of the children Sophia supported them to take an active role in shaping pedagogic practices online. She gave children opportunities to do matching activities and play online games that required manipulating images on the screen and sent them on what she called 'missions' to create a drawing, a Lego construction or find a toy or a household object to share with the group the following week. Rather than viewing the children's homes with their toys and other familiar objects as a distraction, Sophia reconceptualised the home and its materials and objects as an agentive space that contained valuable resources for teaching, learning and communication (González et al., 2005). Encouraging children to purposefully select and share these home resources with their peers and actively utilise parental support gave children the incentive to join the class the following week while at the same time it expanded their possibilities for learning Greek. In this sense, children's toys and everyday household objects were repurposed to sustain children's engagement and developing language abilities and were integrated in pedagogic practice online in ways that Sophia had not done prior to the pandemic. With older children aged 14–15, Sophia explained how she gave them the lead. She solicited their input about what platforms and digital resources to use and sought their feedback concerning the content and suggestions about how to improve lessons online. She exploited the affordances of digital platforms, giving older children options and a sense of ownership of their learning.

Excerpt 3

Sophia: My philosophy is when you are dealing with older children you must treat them almost like adults, so you need to discuss everything with them all the time. This helped me a lot at the beginning, I solicited their opinions all the time. What did you think about the lesson? What would you have liked to do differently? Or how do you prefer to be sent the homework? It really helped me that I had a platform (google classroom) that I knew they would use, and I saw attracted their interest. I saw children participated in the lesson.

> Vally: The platform allowed you to organise your teaching resources.
>
> Sophia: Yes, this was a real advantage of asynchronous teaching having a platform where you can upload a lot of resources. I had given them a lot of resources, articles, my own notes, things I found online. I gave them the option to whoever wanted to engage in a topic in more depth to read more. So, the resources they had at their disposal were a lot more than what I would have given them in an in-person lesson.
>
> Vally: Yes, I noticed this too.

By exploiting the affordances of the digital platform and children's established digital abilities in navigating it, Sophia was able to share with them a wider range of activities and texts than she would have done in face-to-face lessons. Additionally, she gave children the option to engage with the material on their own terms, developing what Maria EK referred to as 'good learning how to learn strategies so that children become autonomous learners'. Indeed, teachers sourced, and collated an unprecedented wealth of age and level appropriate digital materials which they exchanged, discussed, and evaluated in their online meetings, utilised in their lessons online, and shared with the parents of younger children or uploaded on google classroom for older children to access independently. These materials included links to songs, theatre performances, digital stories with voiceover, films as well as reading comprehension activities, online games and vocabulary building activities. The expansive use of digital resources to support Greek language and literacy learning provided children with opportunities to utilise their extant digital abilities, expand their semiotic repertoires and connect sites and mediators of learning. Crucially, teachers created digitally mediated pedagogical spaces where children were able to exercise agency and take ownership of their learning in new ways.

Forging digital affective spaces and doing community online

For teachers, teaching online was perceived and constructed as incongruent with the main objective of Greek school which was first and foremost understood as building relationships, establishing a school community and a sense of belonging with other children and families who share a Greek heritage. In their reflective accounts, teachers highlighted the synergetic relationship between language, culture and community continually recreated and re-enacted through personal ties and friendships nurtured through weekly face-to-face interactions and school cultural celebrations. The teachers' views are a powerful reminder that language maintenance is interconnected with community maintenance and that Greek school has a broader remit than simply developing children's language and literacy skills and proficiency. It is constructed as a key site for socialisation into Greek culture, identity, and community (Charalambous, 2019; Voskou, 2021). This broader sociocultural and affective remit chimed with parental motivations for sending their children to Greek school rather than opting for private tutoring or online lessons (Lytra, 2014). Teachers monitored closely children's affective responses to physical separation and the absence of the embodied aspects of communication and stressed the importance of children articulating their experiences and emotions. Maria C. compared the older children who were able to recreate a sense of shared sociability online with the younger children who were keen to return to school and reflected on what their divergent affective stances meant for recreating a sense of community online.

Excerpt 4

Maria C: With the older children I could see that they were happy to go online and share their news, they talked a lot about what we were doing in class, what we will do for the end of year celebration. I think the feeling of community was not lost. Now the truth is that the younger ones complained and said 'we want to come back to school, I don't want to do anything else online' they said. OK, they still saw each other online, we still shared our news, they showed their things, they showed what they had created, arts and crafts they had made, but compared to the older children they had a greater need to come back to school, to see their friends up close. Now all the children were always happy to see each other, and they always asked after anyone who was absent, 'is he coming? Where is he?' We didn't lose the community spirit, but something was lost.

Maria C. curved out affective spaces during online lessons for children to share news and like Sophia (in excerpt 2) to present arts and crafts projects they had created at home to maintain 'the community spirit'. To counter the sense of loss of the physical and affective bonds (Lim, 2020), she rethought and redesigned her lessons shifting from an emphasis on literacy development to cultivating children's oral abilities enabled by digital media and resources. She provided children with ample opportunities to narrate and share their lived experience under lockdown and adapted the content of her lessons online to include the teaching of geography facilitated by the use of digital maps.

Excerpt 5

Maria C.: Our main aim was to speak Greek, to share our experiences because we were all locked up in our homes. For me the aim of Greek school is that we all feel part of a Greek community, we meet new people, and we promote Greek language and culture. We did a lot more geography, we opened a map, we saw how far Switzerland is, the islands. Geography was done more directly and easily online because we had access to the interactive map on google.

Doing community online also required rethinking and redesigning cultural celebrations. For instance, teachers launched an online creative writing competition over the Easter break entitled 'Easter at home'. The creative writing competition emerged as a response to children missing out on the embodied and collaborative elements of school celebrations: decorating the traditional Easter candles (lambades), dying Easter eggs red and creating festive Easter crafts. Children were encouraged to share their stories of Easter under lockdown and experiment with different forms of creative expression (essay writing, drawing, the making of digital comic strips and digital films). The writing competition attracted 19 individual and whole family submissions. In her reflection, Maria EK evaluated the creative writing competition positively, stressing that its purpose had been to sustain a sense of community and create an affective space to share the emotional labour of lockdown. At the same time, she elaborated on how she had integrated the competition in the curriculum and connected it with the Easter readings she had selected, a short story entitled 'Easter at sea' by Andreas Karkavitsas and a poem by national poet Dionysios Solomos.

Excerpt 6

Maria EK: I think the idea of the competition was a very good one, it gave children a stimulus [Vally: right] and crucially we connected the competition with the Easter readings, that is 'Easter at sea' and Solomos. So, we presented the readings during the lesson, we discussed them and then we connected this very special Easter on a boat to the writing competition.

> *The competition was more about maintaining relationships and sharing a little of the emotions of that period.*

The creative writing competition provided a pedagogic space for children to mobilise their imagination, expand their linguistic, cultural, digital, and aesthetic resources and utilise a wide range of modes, including digital resources to craft their stories. Anderson and Macleroy (2016) have demonstrated the transformative effect of using digital media and resources in sustaining language and literacy learning through exploration with multimodal and multilingual bricolage grounded in children's real-life experiences and meaning-making capabilities. The temporary digital mediation of teaching and learning enhanced opportunities for learner centred pedagogic responses: teachers leveraged the socio-affective and pedagogic potential of the use of digital media and resources to support children's affective communication and self-expression and craft a sense of community and belonging online.

Continuing and adapting textbook heavy pedagogies online

Teachers were troubled that children may fall behind in the instructional and formal aspects of Greek language and literacy learning. The school had an explicit Greek monolingual language policy and teachers actively encouraged and facilitated monolingual practices to boost Greek language and literacy learning. In practice they concurrently supported language practices that leveraged children's linguistic and cultural repertoires (Lytra, 2022; Lytra et al., 2023). Nevertheless, children's flexible and dynamic language practices were a source of anxiety for parents and teachers alike prompting ongoing reflections and discussions about how to reduce traces of other languages in children's speech and writing during instruction (cf. Karatsareas, 2021a, 2021b for similar findings in Greek heritage schools in the UK). For most Greek school parents developing literacy in Greek focused on mastering the academic variety and took a narrow skills-based approach. This approach was influenced by prescriptivist, and purist language ideologies well-documented in Greek state education as well (Koutsogiannis, 2017; Koutsogiannis & Hatzikiriakou, 2018).

Teachers were cognisant of parental expectations which reinforced the school's Greek language policy orientation and intensified anxieties about children falling behind during lockdown. One distinct way of measuring children's attainment in language and literacy was by completing the curriculum for each level which in turn was depended to a large extent on completing the requisite units in the textbook. This textbook heavy pedagogy focused on instructional and formal aspects of language and literacy (development of four skills, grammar, and vocabulary building). Teachers mainly used a textbook series specifically designed for teaching Greek as a second/foreign language. The book series followed the CEFR levels (A1-C2). It was published by the Centre for the Greek Language which administers the Greek language certification examinations and was approved by the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. The stated aim of the textbook series was to develop students' communicative competence. Textbooks were employed in conjunction with selected print-based and some digital material for teaching Greek as a second/foreign language alongside selected textbooks used in the Greek state educational system and age and grade level appropriate reading books. When asked about how she had delivered her language and literacy-focused lessons online, Maria EK

immediately voiced her concern about completing the curriculum and explained how she continued and adapted the textbook heavy pedagogic practices she used for language and literacy learning to the online environment.

Excerpt 7

Maria EK: I had a concern for all the groups, not so much for the adult groups though. I wanted to finish the textbook with group levels A1 and B1. I wanted to complete the curriculum. I want to change the children's textbooks now, move on to B2. In the first online lesson I tried to plan the lesson almost like I planned it in the classroom. I was very cautious, to see if it works. I saw that the children were absolute troopers. They knew all the routines. We didn't waste any time. In fact, the children were more concentrated. So, what did I do? I delivered the lesson like I used to do but a little differently. First, we would study the vocabulary, we did the exercises in KLIK (the textbook), we did the crossword puzzles and all the games. We played some oral games too. Then, we did silent reading and reading comprehension activities. For homework they had to write a short text using the vocabulary and grammar structures we had studied during the lesson. Many children did the writing activities. I was very pleased. They wrote their own texts. And the children completed the units in the textbook. If I had seen that there was a problem that the children were losing interest and were not concentrated, I think I would have chosen something different.

In her narrative, Maria EK justified her choice to continue the textbook heavy pedagogy 'but a little differently' by invoking the children's familiarity with classroom pedagogic routines and practices (e.g. brainstorming, identifying, and copying new vocabulary in their notebooks, doing silent reading, reading comprehension, oral and writing activities) centred around the textbook and their readiness like 'absolute troopers' to adjust them to the online environment. These conditions allowed her to maintain her lesson plans with adaptations, complete the curriculum, and envision introducing the next textbook in the series the following year. In her end of year self-assessment, Maria EK further reflected on the adaptations she made in her teaching online: 'I think the use of the textbook continued successfully, we found a way to play and learn, to write and talk, to communicate, to share thoughts, anxieties and emotions created by the conditions of confinement. In each lesson the children had the opportunity to present to their classmates a construction or a drawing, a toy or something else that kept them company at home'. In her self-assessment, Maria EK reconciled the continuation and adaptation of textbook heavy pedagogies with the importance of linking children's language and literacy learning 'with their lived experiences, their everyday school learning, and where possible making connections with the French language'. The textbook heavy pedagogy allowed her to focus on teaching the academic variety of Greek associated with educational progression, while adapting it to embrace children's developing digital repertoires. Textbook heavy pedagogies were understood to co-exist with learner centred responses that exploited the pedagogic and socio-affective potential of children's meaning-making resources, abilities, and experiences under lockdown.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper asked how a group of Greek heritage language teachers actively responded to the possibilities open to them as a result of the temporary shift to teaching online during the first lockdown in francophone Switzerland. Operating outside centralised educational

policy structures and without any guidance and support by Greek and Swiss educational authorities, teachers acted as emergency grassroots policy makers. Exhibiting openness and flexibility, they mobilised divergent co-existent pedagogic practices that sought to reconcile more learner centred responses with established textbook heavy pedagogies. Taking a translingual and transcultural lens allowed us to focus on how teachers recognised and leveraged children's developing digital resources and abilities and expanded children's semiotic repertoires. Teachers connected sites and mediators of learning across home and virtual classroom and supported children to assume an active role in shaping pedagogic practices online and take ownership of their learning. In addition, teachers maximised the socio-affective and pedagogic potential of using digital resources and media to assist the development of a shared sociability online and children's self-expression. By making curricular adaptations and experimenting with new digitally mediated pedagogic practices such as the online creative writing competition over the Easter break, they sought to redress the affective labour of lockdown and counter the absence of the physical and affective bonds among the members of the school community (teachers, children and their families). These findings corroborated and extended teachers' reports on the temporary shift to teaching online in Giavrimis and Ferentinou (2022) and Koutsogiannis (2020). These studies illustrated how teachers working in the Greek national educational system took initiative, worked independently and in supportive collaborative networks to extend their own digital repertoires and rethink and tailor their pedagogical goals and practices to the unforeseen local conditions as well as maintain contact and rapport with students and families. They highlighted that the temporary digital mediation of teaching intensified more learner centred pedagogies and teacher agency driven by 'the opportunity to take initiatives in planning their own learning activities and to take responsibilities regarding the educational content and process' (Koutsogiannis et al., 2020).

The paper also illustrated that teachers were concerned with delivering the curriculum, meeting language and literacy objectives and managing parental expectations. They leveraged children's familiarity with established textbook heavy pedagogies for formal and instructional aspects of Greek language and literacy learning which they sought to adapt to different degrees to the online environment. Fullan et al. (2020) and Chik and Benson (2021) critiqued teacher responses that transplanted pedagogic practices from in-person teaching to online environments with little regard to children's extant digital practices and abilities. The findings in this paper show a more nuanced picture. Teachers' pedagogic responses did not exhibit a rupture with dominant textbook-heavy pedagogies; rather teachers sought to reconcile these established pedagogies with more learner centred responses, and the affordances of teaching online with curricular and parental desires and expectations. The concept of 'polycentricy' (Blommaert et al., 2005) is a useful analytical tool to make sense of teachers' divergent pedagogic responses. It illustrates how teachers 'orient themselves to very different sets of norms and expectations often simultaneously' tied to 'different scales' and 'accepted semiotic behaviour' (p. 207). It demonstrates how teachers' orientations to different authority centres, some more established and others more emergent, can enable or restrict their pedagogic choices and shape their pedagogic practices. The tenacity of textbook heavy pedagogies online indicates that textbooks have come to function as an established 'authority centre' that shape teachers' pedagogic choices and practices (Koutsogiannis &

Hatzikiriakou, 2018). The temporary shift to teaching online ushered digital platforms and resources as an emergent 'authority centre'. Echoing Lim (2020), teachers uncovered and recovered children's digital abilities and experiences and utilised them to develop more learner centred pedagogic responses. Orienting to this emergent authority centre 'opened new doors, new ways of thinking about our teaching and new ways of teaching', as Sophia explained.

As the analysis of the teachers' pedagogic responses have illustrated, teachers as grassroots policy makers were not condemned to the fixity of their position. They simultaneously oriented to multiple and divergent authority centres, tied to different spatiotemporal configurations (Blommaert et al., 2005). Teachers' multiple orientations allowed them to retain an openness and curiosity towards the purposeful integration of the pedagogic potential of digital platforms and resources in their language and literacy focused work. Underpinning this openness was the recognition of the need to build on and extend children's extant digital repertoires and experiences and harness digital tools to support learning inside and beyond the digital classroom. While it did not dislodge textbook heavy pedagogies, it led teachers to query their centrality and explore the pedagogic potential of digitally mediated practices that can foster affective, multisensory, and aesthetic aspects of learning. The digital mediation of communication, teaching and learning during the first lockdown invited teachers in heritage schools and beyond to critically reflect on how they might leverage children's everyday digital resources and practices in teaching online. Future studies can explore further how both in-person and online teaching and learning might be developed and transformed to align with children's existing digital practices, preferences, and experiences. Sophia remarked that this pedagogic stance 'is more interesting for children because the new generation has a lot of contact with digital technology, it's hard to find something to capture their attention so effectively when they are inundated by games, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok, Instagram and all the rest'. It is important to emphasise that the acknowledgement and incorporation of children's digital abilities, and experiences to support Greek language learning did not encompass an integrative multimodal and multilingual approach (Ainworth et al., 2023). None of the teachers reported rethinking and redesigning their pedagogy to include children's multilingual repertoires as resources for learning. The temporary shift to teaching online did not challenge the school's explicit Greek monolingual language policy orientation and flexible language practices, such as the purposeful use of translation continued to be only implicitly supported. It appears that the use of a plethora of digital texts and resources in Greek in teaching online and asynchronously further consolidated this policy orientation. This finding raises new questions, how might heritage language teachers exploit digital texts and resources to support and develop pedagogies that leverage children's multimodal and multilingual repertoires? Is this pedagogic stance desirable, for whom and under what conditions?

This paper focused on the investigation of teachers' pedagogic responses at a particular historical moment when teaching temporarily shifted online during the first lockdown. An overemphasis on teacher initiative and autonomy as grassroots emergency policy makers may obscure the volatile conditions under which Greek heritage language education functions. The proliferation of digital technologies and the subsequent experience of teaching online during the first lockdown have accelerated the demand for Greek language classes online in the form of individual and group classes via digital platforms.

It has also seen the swift emergence and consolidation of Greek language schools online with a national and international reach. As a result, increasingly Greek language classes online vie with community-based local heritage language schools for the attention of parents and students. Post-pandemic heritage schools have renewed their demands for greater visibility, recognition, and support by local and national governments. Set against the fragmentation, decentralisation and polycentricity of Greek heritage language education, parents, teachers, and school leaders are calling for Greek educational authorities to resume a more active role in supporting Greek heritage language education (Katehaki, 2023). It remains to be seen to what extent and in what ways evolving local and national conditions might come to enhance or constrain teacher initiative and autonomy in reshaping and reimaging the futures of Greek heritage language education.

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Disclosure statement

Notes on contributors

Dr Vally Lytra is Reader in Languages in Education and director of postgraduate research at the Department of Educational Studies, at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her research, practice, and community engagement has been shaped by a social practice view of language and literacy. Her research interests include multilingualism; community and minority languages education; inclusive language pedagogies; faith literacies; language, ethnicity and diaspora; language ideologies; family language policy; international education and (auto)ethnographic, biographical and collaborative research methodologies. She is the author of *Play Frames and Social Identities: Contact Encounters in a Greek Primary School* and has edited *Multilingualism and Identities across Contexts: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives on Turkish-speaking Youth in Europe* (with Jens Normann Jørgensen), *Sites of Multilingualism Complementary Schools in Britain Today* (with Peter Martin), *When Greeks and Turks Meet: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Relationship since 1923*, and *Navigating Languages, Literacies and Identities: Religion in Young Lives* (with Dinah Volk and Eve Gregory). Her latest edited book *Liberating Language Education* (with Cristian Ros I Solé, Jim Anderson and Vicky Macleroy) was published in 2022 by Multilingual Matters.

ORCID

Vally Lytra 🆔 http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2594-1889

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