



The Delegate

Interview with the President of the SPEL: Professor George Babiniotis

How many words does our language consist of? Is it a truth or a myth that the Greek language has the richest vocabulary (both numerically and semantically) compared to the other languages? Which language is Greek most closely related to? Is there any?

The frequently asked question about the number of Greek words is not an appropriate one. The right question is how many meanings the Greek language has, because meanings are connected with concepts since language is connected with our understanding. So, to answer your question, the Greek language has 150,000 standard words and phrases as mentioned in my dictionary. If we consider that there is an average of three meanings for each one of them (some have 10 meanings, others 7 and others 2), then we have 450,000 meanings. That is a huge number of meanings, which constitutes the wealth of our language and is connected with the development of the language. Our language is being spoken for at least 3,000 years endlessly. It is a cultivated language dating back as far as 1500 BC, in the Mycenaean period, and continuing till today with a pause in between some centuries. It is cultivated language used by Plato, Aristotle, Homer, Aeschylus, Thucydides, Euripides and Plutarch and used for the writing of the New Testament and the translation of the Old Testament, the Divine Service and the Orthodox Hymnography. This is our intellectual endower, our strength and our weakness. Its huge expressive ability is what makes it our strength and the need to learn its dimension is what makes it our weakness.

The myth of Babel seems to be the only existent myth. What was actually the meaning of the myth? Was it that people used to speak many languages in the past or was it because it aimed to remind us the existence of a unique language? Why are there so many languages? Which mechanism differentiated the languages throughout cultures and across different races?



Every people, every nation, their speakers have their own view, namely the conception and expression of the world. Every language is another taxonomy of the world, as perceived by each nation. So, each national language is different as a whole from another language. A linguistic differentiation also exists in terms of geographical areas (dialects and idioms) and in terms of the person itself. Therefore, diversity is a major feature of languages. Historically speaking, we can't explain how some languages resemble each other as regards the vocabulary and structure (grammar and syntax). We can do so only by assuming that some nations lived together for a period of time and they thus influenced each other by using a common language that subsequently changed. This is not proven, it is just a rational assumption accepted by the Historical and Comparative Linguistics. These similarities between languages cannot be explained in a different way. Otherwise, you have to take into account the oversimplified interpretation of loan words. Similar myths about the original characteristics of a language and its subsequent differentiation can be found in many languages. All these languages are but a mythographic and mythological approach of the similarities (everybody on earth spoke the same language) and the differences (the language differentiation is a result of divine punishment as a response to human arrogance). This language confusion is expressed by the 'language tower of Babel'.

Will it always be young people's aim to learn a foreign language or there will be a time that technology will replace it? For example, by using an automatic translator or even by implanting an electronic translator in our minds?

I hope this will never happen, as an implantation would mean the conversion of the human privileges those of wit and spirit - endowments that each one possesses - into a machine, and this wouldn't be useful. We need different languages and there will always be the challenge to learn foreign languages and not just one. Each language – I have said that several times – is another conception and expression of the world. Therefore, it is another way to see the world, different words used for the same things. Consequently, I would never like a potential like this one. Instead, I consider a challenge of high importance the one of mastering firstly your mother tongue. It is a lifetime work initiating from the time of birth reaching the point people pass away. No one has ever mastered a language to its highest level. It is also a challenge to consider the world via other systems, as expressed through other languages. There are translation aids, there is interpreting and there is also one last thing: the Greek language and its development the way it is depicted in its ancient form, through the thesaurus lingue graecit (tig), which includes the recording of all the ancient texts (at about 9.000). It has been calculated that there are 105 million types of words in the texts. The number of different languages reaches 250.000 and the different types of words reach at about one and a half million. The above evidence shows the development of the Greek language. Characterised by the element of continuation, it constitutes a great heritage, a blessing for the speakers of the Greek language.

By Aristeidis Aggelopoulos

Brain teasers

1. Find the committees (6) :

N	P	O	L	I	T	I	C	A	L
C	E	W	L	E	G	A	L	M	O
K	U	F	D	C	P	J	W	V	X
T	R	L	X	O	A	Q	B	F	L
X	O	G	N	S	K	O	M	U	I
S	P	B	J	O	B	V	C	J	P
H	E	S	E	C	U	R	I	T	Y
B	A	H	C	D	N	X	V	O	A
A	N	M	L	I	C	J	B	D	F
H	I	S	T	O	R	I	C	A	L

2. I am small as an ant and big as a whale,
I can soar through the air like a bird with a tail.
I can be seen by day and not by night,
I can be seen with a big flash of light.
I follow whoever controls me by the sun,
but I fade away when the dark fell like ton.
What am I?



By Olga Theofila

Refugee crisis on the spotlight...

Scenes of desperation and chaos all over Europe as more and more people are fleeing the middle Eastern and north African homelands. Struggling for a better quality of life they decide to move towards to more developed parts of the world map. As pressure mounts in Europe for leaders to find a solution to the refugee crisis, here is the question ... what leads to this massive displacement ?

No one would dispute that the refugee crisis is a product of different factors. Poor living conditions, overpopulation, illiteracy as well as racial discrimination increase the likelihood of a war to explode and therefore force the defeated to take the hard road of exile. Conditions of unprecedented violence and wars, extreme poverty, persecution, all constitute a great infringement on fundamental human rights. Except for that, the great powers in the name of imperialism and with the aim of expanding their sphere of influence do not hesitate to attack and decimate entire populations, to create conflicts, to favor racial and religious antagonisms. Undoubtedly, all the above have heavily contributed to the refugee crisis.

For instance, as the UN reported, war in Syria and Iraq as well as continuing violence and instability in Afghanistan and Eritrea have multiplied the wave of immigrants to Europe.

Meanwhile, have you ever wondered what the inner feelings of all these people who were forced to flee their country may be? Humiliation, desperation, fear but also a constant hope for better days to come. Although more than 2.000 people have died in desperate efforts to reach EU so far this

year, no one stops trying, no one gives up despite the difficulty, the courage, the determination, the physical and psychological endurance it takes to survive.

What awaits them when they arrive? In many cases fingerprinting, numbering, detention and police with no sense of compassion. So, if you are going to draw a line, draw a line of respect. Respect that you know nothing about them and get to know them. Show them we have more in common than we have differences. As far as Europe is concerned, it remains to be seen whether essential action will be taken or not.



“A nation of the displaced” is formed, so big that if they were a country, it would make up the 24th largest country in the world.

ONHCR