

***Signs, culture and ideology in Southeast Europe.
Semiotic codes in language, cultural and translation attitudes
from the perspective of the Greeks***

Evangelos Kourdis

Department of French Language & Literature

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Résumé

Cet article portera sur l'étude sémiotique des attitudes, des représentations culturelles et des stéréotypes des Grecs sur les langues et les pays de l'Europe du Sud-est (Balkans) et le reflet de ces attitudes dans la traduction des toponymes. Ces attitudes seront analysées avec la méthode d' Algirdas Greimas cherchant des isotopies sémantiques (codes sémiotiques). Plus précisément, en appliquant la technique sociolinguistique du questionnaire dans cette étude sémiotique, nous pouvons parler d'une approche *Socio-sémiotique* qui souligne le lien entre les deux sciences, comme Greimas l'a souligné.

Mots-clés : *codes sémiotiques, idéologie, attitudes, langues, cultures, traduction des toponymes, Balkans.*

1. Language and culture: a compulsory connection

Language often plays a central, symbolic role in ethno-national movements and conflicts trying to impose a national cultural identity. The movements and conflicts that have arisen from the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe are no exception. Indeed, language has played a central role in many recent conflicts in the Balkans. This research attempts to examine the role of Balkan language and culture in the creation of an image for a Balkan country and how cultural and language ideology is reflected in translation. Language cannot exist outside a cultural environment. Language and culture are in a compulsory connection (Lotman & Ouspenski: 1984, 105-106, Bakthine: 1977, 25-34) and one way to understand a culture is to learn the languages of the culture, the sign systems operating within the culture (Torop: 2002, 600). The relationships and contacts between people, groups or nations are influenced to a large extent by the image that has been shaped for them. Often this is not an objective and realistic depiction of the true world; it is partly a distorted or mistaken interpretation or output. That is why, very often, an image takes the shape of a prejudice or a stereotype. Especially within the Balkans, there are many superstitions and national stereotypes which do not contribute to the peaceful coexistence of the Balkan people (Vouri: 1996, 77).

In the present research, the analysis and interpretation of the semiotic codes concerning the Balkan languages and cultures do not only aim at recording their image, but have also attempted to record the processes of genesis and the mechanisms of establishment of that image. For instance, Greece, as a member of the European Union, the Eurozone and Nato, is looked at from a different perspective by a number of neighbouring countries that belonged to the Eastern block in the early nineties. Over the past few years, these countries have tried to join the European Union. To achieve this goal, they rely heavily on the fact that Greece has been a member of international

organisations for many years now. In fact, Greece was until recently the only Balkan country with such international status.

2. Research method

2.1. From Sociolinguistics to Sociosemiotics

Having as a starting point Volosinov's (1973, 9-10) belief that «without signs there is no ideology» we attempted to conduct a sociolinguistic survey based on the semiotic theory of codes. The affinity of the two scientific fields, Sociolinguistics and Sociosemiotics, is known by Greimas, one of the founders of the Paris School of Semiotics. Greimas supported that Sociolinguistics in fact constitutes part of Sociosemiotics. Greimas (1976, 63) specifically reported that:

«Sociolinguistics constitutes part of a broader theory that could be called Socio-Semiotics and would include the study of connotations of the semiotic systems of clothing, diet, kinetics, etc.».

The two sciences are related because they share the connotation of signs: connotation in language, connotation in social practices, connotation in semiotic systems. Connotative Semiotics is, however, the Semiotics of Ideology¹.

2.2. The questionnaire and selection of subjects

In order to conduct this research, the method of a written questionnaire was used, including ten questions that were presented to thirty subjects (15 men and 15 women). The questions were *open*, *closed* and *mixed* and they aimed at recording people's opinions on topics such as linguistic contact, language and national identity, cross-cultural communication and stereotypes, prejudices against the linguistic and grammatical characteristics of the Balkan languages, the linguistic prestige and relation of the Balkan language to social rise, and the role of Greek education in forming an image about the Balkan languages and cultures. The aim of the questionnaire was to inform us about the subjects' opinion about the topics, originating either from their own experience or from the adoption of other people's views.

The subjects of our research came from Thessaloniki and were selected according to their *qualitative characteristics*. Thus, from the four major social variables (sex, age, social class and educational level), age and educational level were a constant, since subjects were in the same age group (30-35 years old) and had higher education. This group of subjects was selected because, from a semiotic perspective, they are considered interesting given that they have completed their studies, advanced in their professional careers and learnt at least one foreign language. We believe that the combination of these elements contributes positively to the creation and establishment of stereotypes that accompany the Balkan languages and cultures.

2.3. Analysis of the interviews

Answers were analysed using a method of structural analysis based on the notion of isotopy, as first introduced by Greimas in an early work (1966:96). The notion of isotopy is now a key term of the Paris school approach. It was developed by

¹ Eco (1970, 553-554) describes ideologies as codes generating connotative messages.

Greimas as part of a method of linguistic analysis and it is designed to define semantic units on the level of lexemes and below². During the analysis of the answers, some structured semantic totals were located, first intuitively and then systematically, which Greimas calls *semantic isotopies*³ and Eco (1979, 5) calls *homogeneous levels of sense* or simply *semiotic codes*. The term *isotopy* had been translated literally as *single level* or *same plane* (Bouissac: 1998, 323). Based on an examination of their correlation, we can determine a subject's perception regarding this topic. The localisation of codes in the text and the study of denotation provide us with information on how informants perceive the Balkan languages. This is the case because the interpretation of denotation is based on cultural knowledge and we should not forget that language is a special cultural marker.

The study includes two parts: *the analytical part* of the interview and the *explanatory part*. The analytical part constitutes the *semiotic analysis*. We studied the frequency and the order of occurrence of semiotic codes in the text, and the complexity of the subjects' speech, in terms of articulation and syntax of the codes. For instance, in the question "how have you become familiar with the Balkan languages?", the first code identified, and the most frequent in this extract, is the *experiential code*⁴:

« I have many stimuli from these languages, because I have many relatives in Skopje (experiential code) who speak ‘Macedonian’ (code of education), a Yugoslavian dialect (code of education). Also, my grandmother (experiential code) knew Bulgarian very well (code of education), because I am from Serres (experiential code). In the Second World War Germans placed Bulgarians (historical code) there (topological code) and the locals (code of social origin) had to learn Bulgarian to communicate (historical code) in their everyday life. I can communicate (experiential code). But, I don’t know how to write (code of education)...»

The *explanatory part* of the study refers to the connotative level of *ideology*. This analysis of the content, which was based on key words used, attempts to focus on the internalised ideology of our subjects. For instance, in the question «how have you become familiar with the Balkan languages», we can locate a *clerical articulation of codes* (Example 1) and an *appositive articulation of codes* (Example 2):

« I can communicate. But I don't know how to write »
experiential code code of education
Example 2

² For an analytical presentation and application of Greimas isotopy theory, see Lagopoulos & Boklund-Lagopoulou: 1992, 209-217.

³ According to Greimas (1970, 188), *isotopy* is a redundant set of semantic categories which make possible the consistent interpretation of a story, and it results from the reading of the successive segments of the text and the resolution of their ambiguities in view of the quest for a coherent global understanding. A more technical definition is found in Greimas and Courtés (1993, 197), who call isotopy the *repeated* semantic category in the syntagmatic sequence, aiming at discourse homogeneity and reading cohesiveness, or in Fontanille (1999, 3), who call isotopy the repeated semantic content.

⁴ According to Lagopoulos & Boklund-Lagopoulou (1992, 215), the *experiential code* functions as a catch-all for any reference to the individual in his/her relation to persons and space, and covers anything from personal feelings and memories to personal attachments.

3. Semiotic codes and Cultural Ideology

According to Charalampakis (2003, 129), human cultures are constant creations and negotiations of imaginary boundaries between “we” and the “others”. Culture is always seen in a broad sense in comparison to ideology and the symbolic power of its manifestations. For Lagopoulos & Boklund-Lagopoulou (1992, 40), ideology is equivalent to culture and they consider that all cultural practices are activated by the universe of signification – which may also be called ideology – which is each time a socially determined specific conception of the world. The objective study of a culture presupposes taking into consideration cultural problems as a whole. If we isolate one element and evaluate it positively or negatively, it is an ideological lodgement and not a cultural study. According to Scollon & Scollon (2001, 167-174), this is a stereotype that is synonymous with overgeneralisation.

3.1. Semiotic codes and cultural image

In the explanatory part of the study, we realise that the evaluative reactions of many subjects have a commonality: their ideology has been formed based on the stereotypes for Balkan peoples in the Greek culture reproducing these stereotypes. Even when subjects come into contact with these peoples in public places in Greece (e.g., the market of northern Greece, resorts), knowledge about the Balkan peoples still emanates from history books used in the Greek public education system. Information included in Greek history books could be considered discriminatory. The following characterisations correspond to codes that appeared successively at least in 1/3 of the subjects, taking into consideration that the *isotopy* or *semiotic code* is a repeated semantic category in the syntagmatic sequence.

More specifically, subjects used the *political code* in order to speak about Albania as a country, and the *code of mentality*⁵ for her population. Thus, Albania is considered an “underdeveloped”, “poor” country with an “inferior public administration system” compared to Greece and the other Balkan countries. Furthermore, their attitude towards Albanians is particularly negative, since they consider them to be “criminals”. The subjects also emphasised that Albanians were known for their poor education and low development, and a tendency to criminality during their stay in Greece.

As regards the impression of the Greeks about Serbia and Montenegro, we observe - once again - the predominance of the *code of mentality*, but this time with the formulation of positive characterisations about the population as “friends”, “nice”, “sentimental”, and “enthusiastic”. The subjects’ characterisations about Croatia are a little more positive pertaining to the educational level and their way of living. This country has always been considered a European country by the Greeks because of its geographical position; it is adjacent to Central Europe. Another factor is that Croatia has always been considered as being influenced by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Today, Croatia is influenced by Germany, the economic “locomotive” of Europe, according to the Greeks. The subjects reported that they knew few things about the inhabitants of the country other than that they were “civilised” and had a European education and orientation.

For the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), the subjects’ discourse was highly characterised by the use of the *code of mentality* and the *code of*

⁵ This code refers to the mentality and character of people (Lagopoulos & Boklund-Lagopoulou: 1992, 212).

economic activities. Subjects talked about a country that is a political “morfoma”, but which is developing economically mainly thanks to Greek business activity. The population of FYROM was characterised as “intelligent” but also “ridiculous” when their “Macedonian” origin was invoked.

There are many instances of the *code of mentality* in the case of Bulgaria and the Bulgarian population, too. This country was characterised as “corrupted”, “of low educational profile” and “rather unfriendly”, but also as a country which has made great efforts to advance and change economically and culturally over the last few years. The negative point, according to the majority of our subjects, is that although Bulgaria tries to reach the level of the other EU states, it is highly US friendly. The previous characterisations are particularly heavy considering that Greece and Bulgaria have maintained a close political and economic relationship for the past 20 years. However, it should be mentioned that the subjects of this research come from northern Greece, which suffered from Bulgarian atrocities from the late nineteenth century to the end of World War II⁶.

The subjects’ views about Romanian people were better but rather cautious about the country. Apart from the *code of mentality*, it is the first time that the *code of education* has appeared. The country is considered by the Greeks as “poor”, “corrupted” and “problematic” in public administration. Nevertheless, Romanians are considered “nice” by the survey’s informants, who consider the population to be “educated” and “cultured”. At this point it is worth noting that the Latin origin of Romanians is considered their cultural advantage.

Finally, the *code of mentality* governs the subjects’ attitude towards Turkey and the Turkish people. This country is considered as being “delayed” and “under development”, while the population is “nice”, even though it is also labelled “hostile” to the Greeks. The informants also mentioned that they are “US friendly”. This last characterisation has a negative meaning for most Greeks⁷.

3.2. Semiotic codes and Balkan personalities

The *political code* had the highest frequency of appearance when the informants were asked about the most important Balkan personalities they knew. This was followed by the *historical code*, the *code of recreation* and the *code of education*. We have realised that the most famous Balkan personalities are the politicians that became known through the news or Greek foreign affairs (for instance, Tito of Yugoslavia). The historic personalities mentioned by the subjects also have some relation to the history of the Greek nation and are mainly Turks (for example, Turkey’s Kemal Ataturk). The *code of leisure* pertains to professional Balkan athletes who have worked in Greece, while the *code of education* involves the Latin cultural profile of Romania.

4. Semiotic codes and Language Ideology

⁶ On the other hand, Bulgarians consider the Greek culture “spiritual slavery” which they shook off after fighting for centuries (Vouri: 1996, 74). In the course of previous decades, the Greeks were described in school textbooks as “hypocrites”, “backhanded”, “fanatic”, “liars”, “snakes”, and also as “patriots” (Danova: 1996, 50), a characterisation that has a negative meaning for Bulgarians since a good Greek patriot is considered an enemy of the Bulgarian state.

⁷ A previous survey by the Center of Social Morphology and Social Politics, Panteion University of Athens (City Press: 2004, 3), confirms that Greeks do not like some Balkan nations very much, especially the Turks (89%) and the Albanians (88.5%).

Ponzio (1993, 95-98) reports that the problem of ideology is inevitably a semiotic question⁸. He also connects ideology with social reality, underlining the presence of a middle term between ideology and social reality. He identifies that middle term with verbal language and sign system in general. Specifically, for language ideology, there is always a powerful connection between language ideology and semiotics. According to the semiotic anthropologist Silverstein (1979, 193), *language ideology* can be defined as sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalisation or justification of perceived language structure and view. For Silverstein, rationalisation marks linguistic ideology within the more general category of metalinguistics, pointing toward the secondary derivation of ideologies, their social cognitive function, and thus the possibility of distortion. Ideological distortion in this view comes from inherent limitations on awareness of semiotic process and from the fact that speech is formulated by its users as purposive activity in the sphere of interested human social action (Woolard & Schieffelin 1994, 57).

In our case, the subjects' speech about Balkan languages and cultures had mainly an ideological basis. The Balkan languages are hardly unknown in Greece. That is the reason why the evaluative attitudes⁹ of Greeks are characterised by expressions such as "I believe", "it appears to me", "they say that", etc. The subjects assume that the Balkan languages feature words that have too many consonants - this triggered the appearance of the *code of education*. Thus, these languages are not considered "well-sounding" (*aesthetic code*), with the exception of the Romanian language whose aesthetics was positively commented on due to its Latin origin. The generalisation that all the Balkan languages resemble each other and belong to related linguistic families (*experiential code*) is also impressive.

We need to stress that the subjects' knowledge of the Balkan languages is relatively limited despite the fact that they are educated. However, they expressed their admiration that these languages had been maintained throughout the centuries despite their being geographically isolated in the Balkan area. The liveliness of the Balkan languages is combined by the informants with other, non verbal, semiotic systems, such as *kinetics* and *expression* competence. Nevertheless, they have no wish to learn any Balkan languages unless needed for professional reasons (*code of economic activities*). In that case the Turkish language is usually preferred.

The belief that language is a value system and not just an instrument of communication has ideological dimensions when it is combined with the superiority of some languages (Charalampakis: 2003, 140). Interestingly, the subjects did not relate the Balkan languages to national consciousness or language prestige or superiority, but they focused on the aesthetic part and the non-verbal semiotic systems, e.g. kinetics¹⁰. On the contrary, the Balkan peoples focused on relating language with national consciousness and identity and approached the Greek language through this perspective. In particular, Bulgarians see the Greek language as a threat to their spiritual entity and consciousness (Vouri: 1996, 74).

⁸ Similarly, Rossi-Landi (1972, 9) believes that a doctrine of ideologies without semiotics is incapable of articulating itself sufficiently. On the other hand, he also believes that semiotics without the support of a doctrine of ideologies, remains a specialized discipline, without any connection with practice, in spite of its claim to be a general theory of signs.

⁹ The aspect of evaluation is central to Reis's (1993:31) definition of the ideological sign as a sign whose meaning is axiological. Axiology is also the key term in Greimas's & Courtes's (1993, 179) semiotic theory of ideology.

¹⁰ In the past, there was a tendency among many Balkan linguists to get caught up in the linguistic nationalism that pervades public policy in most Balkan nation-states, including Greece (Joseph: 2003, 232).

5. Semiotic codes and Translation

According to Kelandrias (2007, 62), the translation process has been and still is a means of propagating ideology. Attitudes connote an ideology that is very often reflected in translation choices. Levefere (1992, 39) supports that at every level of the translation process it can be shown that, if linguistic considerations conflict with ideological considerations, the latter tend to win. The last decades have seen the development of a strong movement studying ideology as a semiotic process. Since translation, despite its core of linguistic activity, is more closely linked to Semiotics (Bassnett: 1991, 13), it is very interesting to study ideology reflected in translation from a semiotic point of view. But what is *ideology* if not *culture*? Torop (2002, 593) states that the most difficult part in translation studies has traditionally been the dilemma between historical and synchronic approaches in the analysis and description of the culture of translation. Especially in toponyms, according to Ballard (1998, 203), we have variations ranging from a simple phonological transcription (transliteration)¹¹, for instance: la Hongrie-Hungary, to the use of different lexis, for instance: Wales-Pays de Galles, sometimes manifesting a domestication of the same toponyms, for instance: the English channel-la Manche.

In a previous study (Kourdis: 2007, 753-772) on translators' cultural attitudes appearing in the translation process, through the study of four pairs of utterances ('Macedonia'/Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Occupied Cyprus/Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, South Albania/Northern Epirus and Constantinople/Istanbul), we saw that the Greeks consider the Greek appellation a denotative code which is based on history and connotes identity. National images/stereotypes can be an inhibiting factor in the translation process. Very often, in the translation process, the attitudes and stereotypes of the target group are taken into account (Ikonomou Agorastou: 1992, 59).

The subjects were also asked about their translation choices concerning toponyms that have been asserted historically by the Greeks. We selected one toponym from each Balkan country abutting with Greece in order to avoid connoting, through our choices, discriminations against specific Balkan countries. We were particularly interested in examining if the stereotypes and attitudes expressed in our previous research are reflected in our subjects' preference. We asked our subjects if they prefer to call/translate the cities "Plovdiv" (in Bulgaria) as "Φιλιππούπολη" [Filippoupoli], "Bitola" (in FYROM) as "Μοναστήρι" [Monastiri], "İstanbul" (in Turkey) as "Κωνσταντινούπολη" [Konstantinoupoli] and "Korce" (in Albania) as "Κορυτσά" [Koritsa] and to justify their choices.

It is worth examining, so as to see the extent to which translation choices reflect the positive or negative attitudes existing in Greece about those peoples. Thus, 89.5% of the subjects declared that they do not mind using the Bulgarian appellation "Plovdiv" instead of or together with the Greek "Φιλιππούπολη" [Filippoupoli] because the Greek community lives there in peace with the local people and, in general, the Greek state has good relations with the Bulgarian one. On the contrary, 77.0% of the subjects believe that we have to translate "Bitola" into "Μοναστήρι" [Monastiri] not only because a large number of Greeks used to live there in the past, whereas today only a smaller number of Greeks still do, but also because this town is very close to the Greek borders and survives thanks to economic activities with Greece. This could also be

¹¹ Standard transliteration varies from language to language, as is easily seen with place names: compare Venezia/Venice/Venise/Venedig or Salzburg/Salzbourg/Salisburgo (Hervey & Higgins: 2002, 32).

interpreted as a reaction to the efforts of FYROM to domesticate Greek history and its historical emblems.

The percentage seems to be much higher (96.0%) when it comes to the use of “Κωνσταντινούπολη” [Konstantinoupoli] instead of “Istanbul”. The Christian connotation of the city’s name, the fact that it was the capital of a Hellenised Empire, the Byzantine Empire, and that there is still a Greek community there constitute elements which are taken into consideration by the subjects. There were very few subjects who answered that the Turkish appellation could also be used. The Greek “Constantinople” means the “city of Constantine” and the Turkish term “Istanbul” is considered to have evolved from the Greek phrase “go to the city”. So these subjects accept the toponym “Istanbul”. The Turks, however, do not share this view. Petrounias (1993, 228) moreover mentions that the use of the appellation “Constantinople” is a national insult to Turks even though it is used by many foreigners, not only Greeks¹².

Finally, the percentage is much lower for “Korce” (72.0%). “Korce” is a town situated in a region which the Greeks consider Greek and call Northern Epirus, but on the other hand, which the Albanians consider Albanian and call Southern Albania. Although a Greek minority still lives there, a great number of Greeks accept that this is part of Albanian territory. So, the Albanian appellation could also be used in parallel to the Greek appellation “Κορυτσά” [Koritsa], much more now that the political¹³, economic and commercial relations between Greece and Albania have improved spectacularly.

6. Concluding remarks

We have a long history of social attitudes and stereotypes, as language is not socially innocent (Barthes: 1959, 19). If we search in texts of antiquity, we will confirm the negative attitude of Ancient Greeks toward other populations which they called “barbarian” or “uncivilised”. That attitude shows that language is a contributing factor of social attitude and ideology. Many social and ideological messages are contained in the simplest or most complex utterances and are manifest in the speaker’s lexical, grammatical and syntactical choices (Frangoudaki: 1999, 24, Kress: 1985, 31, Nöth: 2004, 18).

The analysis of the explanatory part of the study shows that the inevitable European course of the Balkan countries has not entered the consciousness of the Greeks. History and cultural contacts have created a stereotypical situation for the Balkan population¹⁴ and their languages. This is also probably the reason for the high occurrence of the *experiential code* and the *code of mentality* (using positive and negative characterisations), as well as of the *political code* and the *historical code*. That means that subjects try to compensate for the lack of knowledge about these peoples by drawing information from the past and expressions that do not declare certainty. In particular, the use of the above codes confirms Agheyisi and Fishman’s

¹² Similarly, the Greek authorities considered as offensive the invitation sent by the Turkish bank Ziraat Bankasi A.S which, in its bilingual invitation (in English and in Turkish) to the opening of its branch in Komotini, referred to the city of Komotini by its Turkish name, “Gumuljina” (Makedonia newspaper: 17/2/2009, 13)

¹³ The political situation of each period seems to influence and sometimes justify a translator’s choice in rendering a toponym. It is worthnoting Symeonidou-Christidou’s (2005, 451) remark on the use of the appellation “Salonique” instead of “Thessaloniki” in the work of Joseph Nehama «Histoire des Israelites de Salonique» (1935-1978).

¹⁴ According to Skopetea (2002, 67), stereotypes in the Balkans were created over the centuries, in an unequal but nevertheless constant collaboration between domestic and Western actors.

(1970, 139) remark that practically everybody agrees that attitudes are learned from previous experience and that they are not momentary but relatively enduring.

This is also manifest by the infrequent appositive use of the semiotic codes that declare certainty and firm views. When subjects use various semiotic codes appositively, this reflects an effort to support their opinion. For instance:

« Bulgarian is an easy language (experiential code), poor sounding language, (aesthetic code), I like it aesthetically (aesthetic code) and have learned the Cyrillic alphabet (code of education)».

Also, subjects avoided articulating the semiotic codes clerically. The clerical codes usually express the cause or the explanation. In our research, however, there does not exist a need for a wider use, because stereotypically certain elements are considered widely known and there is no need of explanation. For instance:

« Since Albania has a low standard of living (code of cost of living) [so] the persons are dowdy (code of mentality) ».

In any case, it is worth noting that the subjects' education level did not influence the quality of their answers. The study shows that the subjects were unable to conceive the cultural reality of the Balkan countries. We believe that this is so because Greek society is highly influenced by and very familiar with the Anglo-Saxon culture, which has been diffused through the media, and especially television. This has led to a kind of marginalisation of any non-Anglo-Saxon cultural production. Balkan cultural production is not considered prestigious, but of a strong local character. We do not believe that this happens because Greeks downplay the Balkan cultures. The subjects did not attempt to devalue the Balkan cultural identity¹⁵ in an effort to create their own cultural identity or create *the basis of their socius*, a practice met very often, as Amselle argues (1995, 30). On the contrary, the subjects' sex appeared to influence their reasoning as the male subjects appeared better informed about political, historical and linguistic issues regarding the Balkan Peninsula, whereas female subjects had a more passive knowledge.

When subjects were asked to comment on the Balkan languages, they approached them comparatively. For instance, «the Serbian language is nicer than the Albanian, it sounds like the Bulgarian language, but the nicest of all is the Romanian». It is a *comparative discourse* that we can consider as supportive to the significance of bipolar oppositions (Stanzel: 1991, 76). In fact, it is a contrastive function of national stereotypes which can be considered as one of the oldest rhetorical techniques (Ikonomou-Agorastou: 1992, 87) used in an effort to cover a lack of knowledge about the characteristics and history of the Balkan languages. We observed, for instance, that the subjects did not know anything about countries such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro, which are considered ex-Yugoslavian. They did not know much about

¹⁵ The issue of identity in the Balkans is so much related with national and cultural existence that sometimes Balkan people go to extremes. Thus, Kuhuczak (1999, 221) underlines that post-Yugoslav delegations used interpreters to communicate, not only with the EU and US delegates, but also among themselves. In this way they emphasised the fact that they represented distinct nations with distinct languages and they turned translation into a tool which helps not to link but to separate communities which once happily used a common language.

Balkan countries such as Romania, which has an affiliation with Greece because of its religion. However, subjects did not emphasise the religious character of Serbia or Bulgaria.

Finally, we were pleasantly astonished by the low frequency of extreme characterisations that we had expected for the Balkan countries with which Greece has current problems, as are the cases of FYROM and Turkey. This shows, in our opinion, that there is an understanding among the Greeks about the populations of these countries, an understanding that constrains the sceptical attitude of wide segments of the Greek population. After all, they try to improve their economy irrespective of disputes with Greece at a political level. Such disputes confuse the public opinion and do not help the European orientation of the Balkan countries.

In regard to translation choices, in the light of the Semiotics of culture it is fair to say that culture is translation and translation is culture (Torop: 2002, 603). Torop adds that translation is an activity that explains the mechanisms of culture. Especially in the Balkans, after the Balkan Wars and World War I, all Balkan nations proceeded to enforce language purification in an effort to especially rid their languages of Turkish words, in order to impose the idea of a distinct nation and for national requisitions (Petrounias: 1993, 131). Thus, translation became a great weapon in that cultural movement. We must not forget that culture change normally involves not the addition of a new element or elements to the culture, but also the elimination of certain previously existing elements¹⁶ and the modification and reorganisation of the others (Linton: 1940, 469).

In the case of the Greeks it seems that the translation of toponyms can restore their cultural truth, norms and values (Berman: 1985, 48). This also means that when we translate we take a stance. According to Penrod (1993, 39) since we are always required to “take position” relative to other cultures and languages, we must as well remain ever vigilant as to the nature of the position assumed. But, in our opinion, this does not happen in the case of the Greeks because of *the ideology of the brotherless nation* at a cultural and linguistic level. A feeling of superiority underlies such an ideology and it emerges in translation. After all, we must not forget Venuti’s position (1998, 11) that translation can never be a communication between equals because it is fundamentally ethnocentric. Venuti’s view seems to agree with Horn’s view (2004, 27) that the problem of translation is a political question decided by power relationships, where one side has the ability to determine its meaning, and the other side is forced to adapt it.

7. In lieu of a conclusion

Williams (1994, 24) states that in the last decades culture has acquired its semantic weight through its correlation with two other concepts: society and economy. Despite twenty years of close economic and social relationships with other Balkan countries after the fall of Communism, Greeks in northern Greece did not know the new social and cultural situation of the neighbouring countries or their politicians, nor

¹⁶ The Turkish researcher Öktem, (2009, 1) remarks that «emerging nation-states in Southeast Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century evicted undesired ethno-religious groups and projected their national visions of time and space on their newly acquired territories. This “Hellenisation”, “Bulgarianisation” or “Turkification” was achieved, inter alia, by the destruction of the status quo *ex ante* that is the pre-national, heterogeneous toponymical order and by the construction of a system of place names reflecting the nascent national order of time and space».

did they know their intelligentsia¹⁷. Our subjects come from northern Greece, in the region of Macedonia. Perhaps a sample from southern Greece, for instance, would lead to different findings. But such a sample does not usually come into contact with the Balkan people, at least not as frequently as the Greeks in northern Greece, especially Macedonia and Thrace.

We believe that the reason why our subjects know only few elements about the Balkan countries and their languages relates to the West-European orientation of the Greeks¹⁸. Greeks are well-informed about the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy, but they are not highly interested in the Balkan cultures. We think that our subjects do not devalue the Balkan cultures, but they overestimate West-European cultures because they are better informed about them. The fact that our sample uses for the Balkan languages and countries semiotic codes concerning representations coming from their families, religion, organised education and politics, permits us to say that they reproduce uncritically cultural representations as a result of the vast influence of the *Ideological State Apparatus* (Althusser: 1971). According to him, Ideological State Apparatuses are social institutions such as education, organised religion, family, organised politics, the media, the culture industries, etc. which reproduce the dominant ideology.

In relation to translation, it seems that Greeks take into account Bakhtin's principle of polyphony that the word hides a multiplicity of ideological positions (Tsitsipis: 2004, 133). Greeks do not prefer the translation of Balkan toponyms where the toponym does not connote its Greek origin in the Balkan language, for instance: Istanbul/Constantinople, Plovdiv/Filippoupoli. On the contrary, they react positively to the translation of toponyms when the translation is phonetically closer to the Greek language, since the connotation of the Greek origin is then more obvious, for instance: Izmir/Zmirni, Sozopol/Sozopoli. This happens because they believe that these toponyms respect the Greek history of those areas, implying that they haven't 'stolen'¹⁹, the Greek history and identity of which the Greeks are very proud, and this fact satisfies them. This remark reminds us of the words of Weinreich (1974, 5), that in language contact there is a symbolic value which the language system as a whole is capable of acquiring and there are also emotions that it can evoke.

Survey Questionnaire

A. Sociological elements of the informant

¹⁷ Todorova (1997, 44) points out that the Balkan identity never played a leading role in the formation of Greek consciousness and that there is no particular enthusiasm in Balkanness, even a mocking resignation, the pejorative edge of the Greeks is reserved to the "Orient" (more concretely for Turkey).

¹⁸ During the twentieth century, Balkan countries looked more towards Europe than to their neighbours, developing more cultural ties with other European countries rather than among themselves. In this respect one could talk of the distance of proximity as the dominant cultural pattern of relations in the case of the Balkans (Kitromilides: 1999, 194).

¹⁹ The idea that translation can be used to appropriate other people's history has an ideological basis. Egleaton (1991, 101) informs us that Ideology is a field of conflict-related contestation and negotiation, in which we remark successive and frequent exchanges: sense and values are stolen, altered and appropriated across the borders of different social classes and groups.

Sex: male female
Age: 18-30 31-45 46-60
Educational level: Primary education
Secondary education
Tertiary education

Profession:

B. Questions

1. *How have you become familiar with the Balkan languages (Albanian, Serbo-Croatian, 'Slavo-Macedonian', Bulgarian, Rumanian, Turkish)?*

media school foreign language
tourism friends profession
other (please specify)

2. *What do you know about these countries?*

.....

3. *What do you know about these people and their civilisation?*

.....

4. *Which are the most famous or the most important Balkan personalities you know?*

.....

5. *What do you know about the Balkan languages concerning their language and grammar characteristics, their language prestige, their history, etc.?*

.....

6. *What do you like and don't like about the Balkan languages?*

.....

7. *Why would you learn a Balkan language?*

for the civilisation it expresses for professional reasons
for its aesthetics for educational reasons
for its prestige for other reasons (please specify)

8. *Do you believe that knowledge of a Balkan language is necessary in our days?*

Yes No

Why?

9. *In which of these cases of toponyms would you use the Greek appellation?*

Istanbul (in Turkish) Constantinople (in Greek)

Plovdiv (in Bulgarian)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Filippoupolis (in Greek)
	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Bitola (in ‘Slavo-Macedonian’)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Monastiri (in Greek)

10. On which of the following do you believe that the translation choice concerning the afore-mentioned cases must be based on?

- the history of Greece
- Greece’s policy
- the international appellation of toponyms or of the country
- the international appellation of toponyms or of the country according to the international law
- the self-determination of each country
- the respect of the individual choice of each translator
- current reality

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