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Conceptualising children's linguistic rights in formal education in Greece*

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Abstract

Linguistic rights (Pavlenko 2011; Skutnabb-Kangas 2019), as a cornerstone for inclusive education, have often been linked to language (Androulakis 2019; Shohamy 2006; Prasad 2012; Skutnabb-Kangas 2019; Skutnabb-Kangas 2022). However, in the context of an applied approach in education, there is a lack of clarity concerning language/linguistic rights visibility in official texts and discourse among policymakers.

A body of scientists have taken a critical approach to human rights (Douzinas 2000; Zembylas 2021) to question the need for a reconceptualization of language/linguistic (human) rights. In this context, our paper attempts to highlight, capture, and discuss the different conceptualizations of language/linguistic rights focusing on children's (language) education in the Greek context through a multilingual education policy lens (Tannenbaum and Shohamy 2023).

Drawing from a transdisciplinary approach combined with principles of decolonizing human rights (Barreto 2018), we carried out a (critical) discourse analysis (Gee 2014) of policymakers (Shohamy, 2010) as well as of educational policy texts. The findings demonstrate different paradoxes (Douzinas 2013) of conceptualizing linguistic rights, resulting in the need to encourage an alternative, non-Western, and childish (Abebe and Biswas 2021) approach to linguistic rights in education as a basis for establishing decolonized language policies for more just education.

Keywords (five-six)

Language/linguistic rights, children, multilingual education policies, ethnography, decolonising lens

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Why re-engage with language/linguistic rights? Positioning our research

Inclusive education, which has emerged as a pillar for recent guidelines for more just education for global, European, and national actors, cannot be seen as separate from human rights. Several studies show the link between inclusive education and human rights (Krehl, Thomas and Walker 2020; Berry 2012), positing human rights as part of a (more) just curriculum. Language(s) as a subject and as a mode of communication is also part of inclusive education. In recent years, this has been based on multilingualism, which usually appears as a critical feature of curricula seeking to be more open to minoritized/minority students (children with disabilities, refugee and migrant children, Roma children). In this context, European guidelines for multilingual education influence—at least at the planning level—inclusive education strategies. The same policies have also been adopted in Greece.

Greece is a “de facto” multicultural and multilingual country with many children of migrant or refugee experience, shaping a multicultural and multilingual school environment. However, only certain teachers sensitive to multilingualism seek to implement relevant practices, and the country has yet to establish an official multilingual approach to education. However, in the new curricula (2021), there is—at least at the level of policy philosophy—an explicit direction towards multilingualism, even if it could be critiqued as embellished or neoliberal (Kubota 2016). Raising awareness of the principles of multilingualism for social, linguistic, and educational justice seems to reinforce scholars' conviction (Androulakis 2019; May 2015; Paulston 1997; Shohamy 2006;

Skutnabb-Kangas 2019, 2020), as well as our own, about the criticality of linking language/linguistic rights and inclusive multilingual education policies through more visible and explicit policy guidelines, as articulated by Tannenbaum and Shohamy (2023). In these circumstances, the conceptualization of language is situated in a political dimension that legitimizes learners' different linguistic repertoires (Oakes and Peled 2018, 155 quoted in May 2022). However, the question remains: How is this approach translated into practice?

Scientific debates on language/linguistic rights and education show a lack of clarity about how to link the two areas, especially regarding more practical concerns, such as educational practices, communication with parents, books in school, etc. We believe that some of the reasons for this reality are based on the complexity of defining language/linguistic rights in education, the 'hidden' aspects of the legal dimension of language/linguistic rights, and the limited engagement of children in policy processes, starting with the limited links between language/linguistic rights or multilingual inclusive education and children's rights. In recent years, a large body of researchers has criticized the way human rights are conceptualized (see, for example, Douzinas 2000; Zembylas 2020) in their ideological starting points and in their relation to concepts such as universality and morality, leading to an increasingly urgent call to re-conceptualize human rights. Added to this is the superficial monitoring of human rights in education by official actors. This results in the continuation of (language/linguistic) rights violations (Grin 2022) and the continuation of a culture of (epistemic) injustices (see Abebe and Biswas 2021; Baker-Bell 2020; Fraser 2010; Fricker 2007; Piller 2016; Roche 2019), creating a culture of tolerance. The consequences lead to children's exclusion from education.

In Greece, the discourse on inclusive education through a rights-based lens became more intense in 2016 with the refugee wave. Several debates in the public sphere on educational policies for integrating refugee children were based on charters and treaties on fundamental human rights. Since 2019, changes in the sociopolitical landscape of the country, such as change of government

(2019), minor waves of refugees (2019-2023), confinement conditions due to Covid-19, accusations of the European Court of Human Rights on the Aegean Sea repatriations culminating in the shipwreck in Pylos (2022-2023), and internal ecological migrants due to ecological disasters (2023), show ever more clearly the need to engage with the rights field.

Based on the above, at a time when contemporary theoretical approaches to human (language/linguistic) rights are increasingly linked to concepts such as decolonisation (of education), distributive justice, ecology, the environment, both local and global (taking into account place and space), we consider it crucial to examine the conceptualisation of language/linguistic rights in the context of Greece with a focus on formal education by both policymakers and children.

Multilingual (inclusive) education policies and language/linguistic human rights

Our theoretical path starts from the relationship between language/linguistic rights and language (educational) policies. Several scholars underline the criticality of these two areas without connecting them to result in an applicable (more) just (language) education for all. This necessitates a link to inclusive education, which for some is a children's right and, for others, a space of claim and resistance to the (linguistic and broader educational) injustices perpetrated in the (formal) educational context. In this context, Thomas, Heng, and Walker's (2020) edited work tried to answer whether inclusive education is a right. Taking a critical approach to their question, they conclude that inclusive education is currently a space for the reproduction of discrimination and bias, a space subordinated to the principles of neoliberalism. Similarly, (language) education policies, drawing on neoliberal principles, seek to develop (language) skills for profit (Thomas, Heng and Walker 2020, 188-189). It is no coincidence that in the Greek multilingual and multicultural context, the compulsory language instruction in formal schooling is English, French, or German, thus perpetuating the dominance of a language industry (ibid.).

Focusing more on language (education) policies and their relation to (linguistic) rights, many scholars agree that this is a concept that draws from several disciplines, such as law, linguistics and sociolinguistics (Skutnabb-Kangas 2018, 2022) and political science (see research on linguistic justice by May 2015; Morales-Galvez 2017; Piller 2016), and which understands meaning-making as a complex issue in a fluid era (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 2022). In the field of law (articles, principles, and declarations), language/linguistic rights touch many aspects of the legal framework: they are placed under either cultural or social rights; they are often part of other rights, such as the right to non-discrimination; they are often interpreted as either individual or collective rights (May 2015) or even 'tolerance-oriented' and 'promotion-oriented' language rights (for a detailed bibliographical description of these terms see May 2015). In this context, Morales-Gálvez (2021) studies linguistic rights in the private and public spheres as “claim and liberty rights” and “non claim and liberty rights” respectively. Linguistic rights as human rights are often considered universal, which means that they are attributed to all people (Dunbar 2022; Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 2022) and therefore also to children – however, this is not always taken for granted despite an explicit reference to the convention of children's rights. At other times, depending on the surrounding arrangement, they are attributed to specific groups, such as minority and indigenous groups (Dunbar 2022), or language rights are activated in relation to territorial and/or historical criteria (Tsitselikis 1996), or citizenship-related conditions (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 2022; Stroud and Heugh 2004; Stroud 2018). Furthermore, in the attempt to make sense of them, the focus is on the spaces where they are (or are not) activated, e.g. courts, prisons, family, and education (Dunbar 2022, 29). We also consider significant the scholarly efforts to develop a global coalition of language human rights (see <https://www.coalitionforlanguagerights.org/>). It is also worth noting that Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (2022, 16) leave open the possibility of talking about language/linguistic rights that have not yet been labeled as such. Finally, an essential contribution to the conceptualization of language/linguistic rights is made by research linking linguistic (human) rights to children's rights (D'souza 2006; Lee-Hammond and Jackson-Barrett 2019; Prasad 2012). Most of these

approach children as persons with agency and as potentially important interlocutors and co-designers (Shohamy 2010), considering their linguistic capital (Androulakis 2019).

We also consider critical the proposals of Abebe and Biswas (2021), who talk about rights in education through a ‘childish’ approach focusing on children's knowledge and show how vital resistance and struggle on the part of children and their communities is. More recently, Tannenbaum and Shohamy (2023) proposed an “engaged policy approach for multilingual education policies” based on the following principles:

Educational agents as policymakers for multilingual education, expanding the range of languages offered in school and the age of commencement, legitimizing translanguaging and beyond, multimodalities: expanded concept of language, promoting multilingual awareness, promoting collaboration among language and content teachers, implementing multilingual assessment. (2023, 116-122).

We also adopt the above principles in this study. The research of Skourmalla and Sounoglou (2021) gave voice to adult refugees/immigrants in Greece about their linguistic rights, as did the research by Makri and Irgis (2015), who attempted a detailed trajectory with a focus on language rights legislation. Nonetheless, a proposal with applicable perspectives on the relationship between linguistic rights, children's rights, and educational policies has yet to be formulated in the Greek context.

At the (language) education policy level, language/linguistic rights are often linked to teaching first languages and, in recent years, to multilingualism. Several efforts have been made to raise the importance of multilingualism and to highlight it in the context of educational policies. At the level of European policies, examples include the actions of the European Commission to disseminate multilingualism, such as the Erasmus programs and other projects, initiatives of the

European Centre of Modern Languages, and the critical approach of language rights through European declarations (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages>) and broader policies (<https://www.coe.int/fi/web/commissioner/-/language-policies-should-accomodate-diversity-protect-minority-rights-and-defuse-tensions>). At the level of national policy, we cannot overlook the effort made in the new curricula for formal schooling, where inclusion and non-discrimination relating to language(s) is a horizontal principle in all subjects (<http://iep.edu.gr/el/nea-programmata-spoudon-arxiki-selida>).

Without assuming that we have covered all the theories and research related to (language) education policy, it seems that their multi-layered nature sometimes raises questions regarding their legitimacy and implementation (May 2015), and sometimes forms an open space of interpretation that can support more equitable approaches to education (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 2022).

(Linguistic) (Human) Rights and neoliberalism

Despite the efforts made to position (linguistic) rights as the basis for a (more) just society and thus education, a body of scholars adopt a critical stance on how language/linguistic rights are conceptualized and how their implementation is attempted. Several scholars speak of language/linguistic rights as a linguistic capitalist norm that draws on colonial and Western-centric approaches to language (May 2022). Others conceptualize language/linguistic rights as a manifestation of ethics detached from political action (Assad 2003, quoted in Kabel 2022). As we have seen, language/linguistic rights in education are often associated with multilingualism. However, this condition is also influenced by neoliberal and capitalist principles (Abebe and Biswas 2021; Krehl et al. 2021; Lacroix and Pranchère 2022; Pavlenko 2011). Kubota (2016) highlights a romanticized approach to multilingualism that insists on separating named languages by recycling a hierarchical approach between strong and weak languages. In the same vein, Kabel (2022, 161) speaks of neoliberal multilingualism, meaning the “imposition” of an

imaginary mix of languages responding to “a new biopolitics of difference” far from “a politics of action”. To these are added the official institutions’ principles (see European Parliament, European Commission, World Organizations, and official national bodies designing educational policies) where language rights are not an absolute priority (Alfredsson 2022). Other researchers, however, stress that resistance to named languages may deprive some children (see Children of minority groups) of their language rights (Heugh et al. 2017, quoted in Tannenbaum and Shohamy 2023). Similarly, opening the umbrella to human rights, Douzinas (2000, 2012) asks whether the way in which human rights are implemented, their universality, and the paradoxes they entail, also mark the end of human rights? In a similar vein, Zembylas (2020) critically reviews human rights and highlights the leading concerns: the universality of human rights, their moral and strictly juridical character, and their Western-centric identity. These result in superficial political actions that “support the aims of liberal capitalism” and “may hinder other political possibilities such as social justice” (Zembylas 2020, 12). Such policies and approaches to language/linguistic rights lead to unequal distribution of language, the recycling of linguistic hierarchies, linguistic violence, linguicide or linguistic and cultural genocide (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 2022; Skutnabb-Kangas 2022; Kabel 2022), or, with a more political connotation, to the linguacene (Kabel 2022). The consequences are concentrated in reproducing linguistic injustices (May 2022; Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 2022). In light of the above, and owing to their explicit invisibility, we often wonder whether linguistic rights “are really rights at all ?” (Dunbar 2022, 25).

Why should we continue the debate on language/linguistic rights?

New approaches to inclusive (language) education and language rights provide an “answer” to the above question, sometimes explicitly, sometimes not. Grin (2022) advocates an approach of non-rights, emphasizing the criticality of seeing and identifying injustices in order to reach social and linguistic justice. Through an economic perspective on language/linguistic rights, he focuses on the common good, which he considers the basis of language policies (Grin 2022). Through a

decolonial lens, Kabel (2022) rejects a humanitarian response in Western terms to language rights violations, and speaks of colonial necropolitics and the need for a renaissance of activist (counter)actions against the oppression of language/linguistic rights.

In recent years several scholars have linked the posthumanist condition and language education policies, (multi)literacies, and language teaching (see Herbrechter 2018; Kitsiou and Karantzola 2022; Mooney 2016; Nathan et al. 2014; Pennycook 2018; Pupavac 2012). In the human rights and inclusive education fields, drawing on the principles of posthumanism, Zembylas (2020) advocates a more open approach to rights away from dichotomies (individual, collective, etc.), emphasizing the political dimension of claiming, which concerns the global and the local. Through the same lens, Pennycook (2018) considers that language cannot be seen apart from physical space and approaches language and (language/linguistic) rights as situated and distributed where they are produced. From a more applied perspective, Skutnabb-Kangas (2022, 117) speaks of the need "for mother tongue instruction" for at least six years and for training teachers "to teach in two languages". Shohamy (2010), at the level of implementing language policies through the lens of multilingualism, speaks of the impossibility of implementing multilingual education (see also May 2015). She notes that national ideologies, as well as the broader European and global context, explicitly influence language policies. As an antidote, she emphasizes linking top-down and bottom-up policies and recognizing teachers, parents, principals, researchers, and children as designers, influencers, and negotiators of language education policies, and suggests that language (educational) policies are not formed through linear processes but through the creation of spaces of resistance, such as classrooms (Shohamy, 2010).

We also consider the value of the claim for our rights. Our lens focuses on the relationship between the action of the claim and the child, starting from the child rights movements. Recent studies show the necessity of highlighting children's agency and creating spaces for its development and activation (Jerome and Starkey 2022; Prasad 2012). Children's political positioning is also crucial (Skelton 2019). Similarly, Rodgers (2021) highlights children's agency

and political participation in social movements, offering another view of children's rights away from absolute parental protection, which also recycles exclusively Western-centric norms.

Research Methodology

This study is part of a broader ethnographic research project that focuses on language/linguistic rights violations and ways of resisting them. The qualitative research focuses on conceptualising language/linguistic rights for (more) just language inclusion education policies. To this end, our lens follows a trajectory of conceptualizing language/linguistic rights through the discourses of individuals who design and/or affect educational policies. In an attempt to problematize the concept of rights in language education policies, our main research question is whether, to what extent and in what ways language/linguistic rights are conceptualized in the educational context in Greece? The ultimate aim is to participate in the debate on language/linguistic rights in formal education in Greece, to reflect on (non-)knowledge, invisibilities, language/linguistic rights violations, children's agency in their language/linguistic rights, as well as the role of, and necessary interventions by, the relevant bodies. We hope that our research will contribute to the debate on language/linguistic rights of/in education that has been going on in recent years.

For this purpose, an ethnographic approach (Bejarano et al. 2019; Stahl 2017) was adopted through a lens of justice (de Sousa Santos 2015), decolonization (Baretto 2018; Thambinathan and Kinsella 2021) and activism, which helped us to approach both bottom-up and top-down policies as a continuum. For this part of the research, we conducted semi-structured interviews to bring out the participants' voices (Androulakis et al. 2019) and formulate a body of educational policy texts (circulars, curriculum, etc.). More specifically, the axes of the interview move around the participants' knowledge (scientific, legal, practical) about language/linguistic rights, the (counter)actions of the stakeholders, their positioning in (language/linguistic) rights, the identification of (language) injustices and violations, and the potential of children. We used a

convenience sample, selecting people who are familiar with our activities in the field of inclusive education and rights, and who have an essential role in policy design and development.

Interviews	Affiliation
P1	Member of civil society organisation
P2	Independent Authority
P3	Independent Authority
P4	University
P5	Ministry
P6	Ministry
P7	Ministry
P8	Independent Authority
P9	University

Table 1. Research Participants

We also created a corpus of official policy texts, including new curricula for the subject of language in Greece, circulars of the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports, and European policy texts.

For the analysis, we adopted a critical discourse analysis (Gee 2011), which allowed us to focus on the discourses of (language) education policies through participants' words as well as through

education policy texts. Gee's approach is crucial as it sees language as directly linked to practice. This answers our attempt to highlight the conceptualization of language/linguistic rights in an applicable educational policy. Through construction and deconstruction (see also Archakis 2016), we sought to approach conceptualizations of language/linguistic rights critically. Key lenses applied in our analysis were the "language with a name" approach in the context of linguistic justice (Piller 2016), linguistic imperialism (Phillipson 1992), and epistemic injustices (Fricker 2007). It is crucial to underline that our research subscribes to a decolonizing approach, even though our study is about top-down policies. Many of the participants have an activist identity or an identity of active rights assertion. Regarding our positionalities as researchers, Sofia is an educator and researcher who has worked with minoritized groups for the last ten years to achieve more just education. She considers activism to have many layers and positions herself in some of these. She strongly believes in claiming our rights, decolonizing perspectives of thinking and doing, and inclusivity, a philosophy she tries to adopt in her personal, professional, and scientific pathways. George, who has a background in sociolinguistics, is an experienced scholar who spends more and more time in university administration, mentoring younger colleagues and managing research projects, than in primary research itself. He believes in the connection between academia and society, and sees the research, training and education projects he manages as an opportunity for change towards more inclusive education and society, particularly for the most vulnerable groups.

Making sense of (children's) linguistic rights in Greece¹

The critical discourse analysis carried out in the interviews with policymakers (people from official education institutions, independent institutions, academics, and civil society groups) and the discourse of the official policy texts revealed vital elements that help us to rethink the meaning-making of language/linguistic rights by extending existing theories. Drawing on Douzinas (2000, 2012), the results are presented as paradoxes, highlighting the complex nature of language/linguistic rights (in education).

Language/linguistic rights are ... difficult to define only globally

The different approaches to defining or describing language/linguistic rights by educational policy designers and influencers are concentrated on two levels. On the one hand, the definitions draw on the participants' professional pathways to the principles of the institution they represent. On the other hand, language/linguistic rights are conceptualized in terms of the (legal) status of the individuals to whom they are attributed.

It is therefore understood that definitions vary. Some participants adopt definitions that involve an **experientiality**, such as "a place where you can also be proud" (P1_I_A); or definitions that highlight the relationship to communication, such as a language right is "to speak (one's) own language" (P1_I_A) and "to be able to communicate" (P5_I_A).

In addition, the link between language/linguistic rights and official conventions (e.g. Convention on Human Rights, Convention on the Rights of the Child) is reiterated in the participants' discourse. In this way, a legal approach through institutional texts is highlighted as a safe space. As participant P2 states: "First of all, we always see language rights in a holistic perspective of **child educational inclusion** [...] So we have an **institutional framework** that is quite defined.

First of all, **Article 30 of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child** states that in states where there are ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin [...] Other relevant articles **for us** are **Article 17 of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child**, which states that State Parties recognize the importance of the work done by the media and ensure that the child has access to information. [...] Also, **Article 29**, which contains [...] the education of the child shall aim at developing respect for the child's parents, his or her identity, language and cultural values [...] (P2_I_A)."

That is, they are implied through other children's rights.

Staying within an institutionalized approach, language rights are still linked to "**the principle of non-discrimination**, listening to the child's opinion and assessing best interests" (P2_I_A).

Suppose we do not use the term 'child'. In this case, the relationship between language rights and the statuses of different children who often do not enjoy their rights (see indigenous people, deaf people, etc.) is also highlighted. Most examples relate to groups such as Roma children, Pomaks, refugees/migrants, and deaf children. In these circumstances, language/linguistic rights, in terms of who enjoys them, can be changing, reconfigured, and, in short, fluid:

There, in the late 1990s and early 2000s Albanian immigrants came, and later refugees.

The population changed, so that it was no longer about **historical minorities** [like the Pomaks]. The focus shifted to the new minorities in Greece in discussion of children's rights in school. Now in the public school (P4_I_A).

At the same time, we observe that both the legal discourse on language/linguistic rights, and the participants' discourse, focus on the mother tongue. The singular is mainly used:

Now this whole matrix of rights concerns **the mother tongue**, the use of the **mother tongue** in the private or public sphere [...] The state has a positive obligation to include

actions such as for example contact with public authorities, courts and services in the main (P4_I_A)

This is what we call respect, the state must take measures for the patient, respect the cultural specificities of children, **the right to mother tongue** [...] (P3_I_A)

Finally, an interesting perspective opens up by linking language/linguistic rights and the children who enjoy them but are in the same classroom as, or are classmates of, children who lack them:

Such an idea should also be promoted **in a different way**. To think about how **another language** [minority or minoritized] can take him [sic] [the student] to look **beyond his [sic] small horizon** (P5_I_A)

The mosaic of definitions of language/linguistic rights is completed by the view of their non-absolute conceptualisation and delimitation, which allows “for a **dynamic evolution of their interpretation**” (P2_I_A).

Language/linguistic rights ... do not seem so important

Starting from an institutionalized form of language/linguistic rights, we see the following paradox: An institutionalized right is usually related to a critical issue for the existence and wellbeing of a human being, a child. In particular, language/linguistic rights seem significantly influenced by broader language policies in Greece and other political conditions. The use of the term “political” is characteristic:

Unfortunately, language rights **are not independent** and are nowadays very much **influenced by political positions**, for example on the issue of Thrace. Another issue of

refugees coming now we can see a common thread behind them, I think, but still, in the end, **they are hindered** [...] (P2_I_A)

[...] It is a matter **of government policy** [...] [the question is] **is there a political will?**
(P4_I_A)

However, language/linguistic rights seem not to be crucial to a child's life. This has resulted in the construction of a narrative of the insignificance of language/linguistic rights as part of language education policies and, more broadly, as part of the discourse of language/linguistic rights advocates. In the educational context, for example, it seems inappropriate to talk about language/linguistic rights when children do not have practical access to school (issues of enrolment, issues of movement and re-enrolment, issues of mobility):

And now we as researchers, as educators, **talking about language/linguistic rights**, we have, we have made a course to preserve them. **But** if they go to a school today **the reality may not allow them to go to school** [...] it's almost a **luxury** to say well come on let's talk about language rights (P5_I_A)

But I can't say that [language/linguistic rights] is one of our priorities [...] There are many recommendations for education. [...] They can also be considered [language/linguistic rights] part of our recent comments on the anti-discrimination convention [...] Especially with coronavirus, where there were quite a few problems [with access to education] **but now a specific mention of language rights, no** (P3_I_A).

The insignificance of language/linguistic rights is also evident from their constant violation, which leads to the reproduction of injustices. A characteristic feature is the link between

(language) violations and the language education policies adopted, which are described as either incorrect or incomplete:

Also, in my view **it is a violation of the language right [to] not have the appropriate tools to learn Greek as they should** (P8_I_A)

In the Muslim children's program **the children had Greek names [...]** **at home they didn't call them that, no.** [...] They called it Mustafa and it was something Greek from M [...] Because it's a shame [...] because you don't belong to this society (P1_I_A)

Indeed, some violations seem to start from violations that do not concern language/linguistic rights. When intertwined with or even triggered by other violations, they reinforce the narrative of language/linguistic rights' irrelevance:

[...] so we have **so many violations, fundamental** types of violations, the child doesn't go to school at all and they are looking for it [...] and we have been completely absorbed by the fact that we want the children first of all to be in school and [then] to deal with the quality [...] The fact that **children of refugee/migrant origin** at this moment we are talking about are not enrolled and not attending education properly, **they are attending schools without reception classes, so their right [to education and language rights] is totally violated** (P2_I_A)

The identification of violations in relation to language/linguistic rights concludes with a participant's view on how far the invisibility of language/linguistic rights can go. The non-explicit adoption of language/linguistic rights policies, including their duration in the education system in Greece, often results in contempt. **And "contempt itself is violence"** (P1_I_A).

Linguistic rights in language education policies and... many power relations

A common assumption is necessary to make the connection between language/linguistic rights and language education policies: that those who design and influence policies must see and accept the existence of other languages in the school context. This is not always the case. Starting from the above, the participants adopt a critical stance regarding this particular relationship, which is articulated through the us-them dichotomy and takes several forms:

a) Those who do not enjoy linguistic rights and some of us who do not encourage a “space” to enjoy them:

It does not respect **the language of the parents** [...] No communication is made in **their language, they** are obliged to know Greek as soon as they set foot in it (P1_I_A)

Language rights are limited to **students' interpersonal relationships**, because there is simply no other language that is the language of instruction in Greek schools, even in intercultural schools. And there is the big (problem) [...] there is no provision **for the introduction of other languages** [...] (P4_I_A)

b) Some participants support multilingualism. In Greece, the inclusion of the language/s of the learners is one of the key principles of the new curricula that run through all subjects. At the same time, it is one of the subjects of interest to students (New Curriculum for Modern Greek, 2021, p. 12), which is closely linked to the importance of the mother tongue and the learning of other languages and to language technology (ibid., p. 18). However, it is applied only at a superficial level.

c) An interesting perspective is a dual top-down policy: We who make policies in Greece and those who make policies in Europe and the world. This relationship is shaped by i) the lack of support and conscious oversight from European and global institutions:

They are **tools** [international conventions]. **Some people call them wishful thinking.**

Well, they are recommendations, **but they are not interventionist in countries.** So **their implementation** is judged at the **national** level [...] There is institutional pressure to sign, but (in practice there is no monitoring) [...] (P5_I_A)

and ii) the lack of applicable policies as in other countries:

The provision of language/linguistic rights [by the institution I represent] or the enjoyment of them [...]. **We still haven't** enshrined bilingual and multilingual [education]. **So we don't actually have** [policies] [...] Not as a subject what we wanted ... which we are discussing first of all as a culture [that will run through all subjects] (P5_I_A)

Cooperation between various ministries within a national framework is considered essential:

What we always say is where we have been saying in recent years that there **should be a budget** [...] There is for example **the action plan for the child [from the Ministry of Justice] where we all participate** [...] with proposals, comments and of course the relevant ministries [...] **it is a horizontal issue** (P3_I_A)

The participants are aware of the complexity and difficulty of an applicable approach to language/linguistic rights, which takes time. The critical stance shapes a need for further discussion.

Language/linguistic ... children's rights

Participants agree that children can play an active role in claiming their rights. Of particular significance is the experience or participation of those who design and influence educational policies through a lens of activism, in actions to assert rights, or their willingness to take a role in the future. Several words indicating an activist stance, such as struggles, collectivity, etc., can be discerned:

So there is a very **dynamic part** from which I learned about linguistic rights was the deaf people who were a very recently speaking cultural community with many **struggles**. They have now been achieved and it is in the constitution that Greek Sign Language is an official language (P5_I_A)

The **struggles** that did not take place yet [...] For language rights we do not have. We have not **yet** enshrined bilingual and multilingual education (P5_I_A)

In practice, however, the mobilisation of stakeholders to claim children's language/linguistic rights is limited. It is a common assumption that the few reactions to language/linguistic rights are exclusively from the actors, without explicit references to the active involvement of children:

Mobilisation and demand **only by the actors. The children are nowhere** - nor are they represented. Only **mediated** (P3_I_A)

In potential plans to reshape (language) education policies, the focus seems to remain on those who make policies by limiting children's agency. However, children's will and encouragement to take more active roles often depend on other factors. Approaching childhood as a space where protection is needed —primarily through international conventions— can deter children's active participation in claiming their rights:

I blame the **financial trend**, because this is the source of the evil, that is good and the fact that **in Greece** there is a culture in general that someone **can delegate the care and protection of children's rights to others in private, without certifying them and without supervising them** this has always existed (P2_I_A)

Even encouraging children —from the top down— to assert their rights can be a deterrent. Do we know whether language/linguistic rights are critical for children?

The thing is that when one thing comes over the top [...] **things become superficial**. And that telling the children these are your rights. **It's about doing activism on the things that really concern children** (P1_I_A)

It is necessary to create “space” in top-down policies for the assertion of language/linguistic rights by children:

[...] organising a political group, a school unit in such a way that it functions as a community, that **students function as citizens and can be empowered** in relation to it (by claiming) (P5_I_A)

Encourage **collective action** [...] First of all, build trust between the teacher and the children. Give space to the children, to bring what they prioritize as their primary needs (P1_I_A)

(Re-)Conceptualization of language/linguistic (children's) rights?

When considering the reconceptualization of human rights (Skutnabb-kangas and Phillipson 2022), scholars, to a greater or lesser extent, end up questioning the purpose of rights (Douzinas 2000) or even the very existence of language/linguistic rights (Dunbar 2022). They consider that

the way rights are conceptualized does not correspond to human needs in the current sociopolitical reality (May 2015; Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 2022). Our research has drawn a similar conclusion. In this study we attempted to capture how language/linguistic rights are conceptualized in the formal education context in Greece through policymakers' perspectives and policy texts. The paradox of studying top-down policies is placed in the broader context of decolonization: participants are individuals who, in addition to their institutional role, have declared themselves in their discourses and actions to be defenders of (children's) rights, often with activist intentions. Language/linguistic rights are familiar to the participants; however, the picture is blurred when we have to define them through applicable multilingual education policies, and even more so when the discussion extends to children's active participation and children's language/linguistic rights. Yet we consider all the discussions that took place to be vital, as they offer new insights into our way of thinking about the subject of our research. Through participants, policy texts, our own (situated) positions, and recent theoretical frameworks and research, we end up discussing three axes.

a) Is one universal conceptualization of language/linguistic human rights necessary?

It seems that even at a micro level, an attempt to approach language/linguistic rights in schools focused on pedagogical criteria seems complicated, confirming the narrative of the lack of explicit reference to language/linguistic rights in official policy texts and the low importance of language/linguistic rights compared to other rights. Instead, an approach that explicitly placed them in the broader context of educational policy would highlight their value, and a focus on practice (see, for example, policy proposals for first-language teaching policy, Skutnabb-Kangas 2022; Tennenbaum and Shohamy 2023) could respond to the needs of a (more) equitable school. Participants' narratives, as well as the relevant literature (see Grin 2022), show to be necessary, for the Greek context, an approach to language/linguistic rights through the concept of injustices (Grin 2022; Roche 2019) and their relation to other rights and freedoms. According to the participants, such approaches must focus not only on the use of languages and communication,

but also on specific individuals and spaces. The (linguistic) injustices will allow us to go deeper into who experiences them and, therefore, where there is a need to situate language/linguistic rights. At the same time, an attempt to decolonize rights as advocated in the theoretical framework also highlights hidden injustices. It enhances children's self-awareness in the field of language/linguistic rights. Added to this, monitoring (see Grin 2022) by official bodies (see European Court of Justice) or bodies that could be established for this purpose at the national level, could enhance a more applicable approach to language/linguistic rights in education in Greece. For example, practical access to school for all children is often characterized as a critical prerequisite for education with equity. Then, concerning children's practical access to school (registration, transportation), the role of language/linguistic rights is considered necessary, especially with regard to pedagogy, teaching and learning of first languages, or their use during lessons. Another example concerns filling out official documents, teacher-parent communication, etc. In light of contemporary studies and inclusive schools, let us consider whether language/linguistic rights are only necessary for children's later successful access. Let us then position the above "non-communication" as a linguistic injustice, as a violation of a right. We are talking about rights that are not monitored and are violated over time, without any official body being concerned, without the people whose rights are violated being informed, without being covered by official (educational) policies, etc. It is understood that access to school is shaped by different factors that do not draw exclusively from a Ministry, etc. The above inscribes the need to approach language/linguistic rights as situated in specific political, social, and educational conditions. Tannenbaum and Shohamy (2023) propose a framework that contains principles based on a multilingual context, which are local with global potential, and which can be applied at the level of educational policy. However, these need to be supported by broader European and global policies. From this point of view, a legal approach to language/linguistic rights based on articles, provisions, and international conventions is essential. Here, we discuss a critical legal approach to make language/linguistic rights visible and legitimize their existence, in keeping with our fluid, linguistically, and culturally superdiverse society.

b) Language/linguistic rights in education policy for whom?

The first, spontaneous answer is language/linguistic rights for children. Whether explicitly or implicitly, language/linguistic rights belong to children of minority or minority groups – this is reinforced by the relevant language/linguistic rights legislation. However, if we look carefully at these cases, a paradox emerges that implies a segregation policy. Some children belonging to a particular group have more rights than other children belonging to another group. For example, children belonging to groups speaking a minority language are protected by European conventions. What about the children “not identified through a status”? This is often covered by positively inclined language education policies, such as those highlighted in the new language curriculum in Greece, but, as we have seen from the literature, these a) often rest on an embellished and neoliberal basis, and ii) are not compulsory, and are often implemented superficially. Added to the above inclusive policy focus on long-settled language groups (Morales-Gálvez 2021) and/or newly arrived children. We rarely consider the needs of children who do not have a minority language in their repertoire and consider that they enjoy all their language/linguistic rights.

However, is the need for children to come into contact with languages spoken by their peers a language/linguistic right? In other words, language/linguistic rights, as they have been framed, seek to foster a culture of preserving first languages as heritage languages rather than a culture of awareness. The current conceptualization of language/linguistic rights focuses exclusively on separate groups of speakers - and by extension, of students. This can be approached with a positive (see Morales-Gálvez 2021) and negative bias. Drawing from Pennycook (2018), language/linguistic rights can be situated in the context of the educational system in Greece or even in specific schools and distributed to the children who shape a classroom.

Additionally, under the umbrella of linguistic justice, adopting Piller's (2016) approach to named languages, we consider it crucial to explicitly and regularly refer to language (rights) as a

recognition (Fricker 2018). Thus language/linguistic rights will be marked as necessary for children, since their first languages or all the languages they use to communicate will be recognized as named languages belonging to their, and the school's, repertoires. These languages will be part of their knowledge, which will ideally be used in the classroom, influencing books, teaching, and learning spaces, and as such will be part of everyday school life. This concept starts from a positioning of language as situated and distributed (Pennycook 2018) in the everyday spaces of children's lives in Greece and elsewhere. These insights agree with the proposal of Abebe and Biswas (2021), who talk about rights *in* education through specific strategies: encouraging the relationship of space, time, and childhood, considering political conditions, reactivating institutions, and situating our educational policies.

c) Language rights by whom?

Within a broader context of reconceptualization of (linguistic) human rights, we are concerned not with the obvious, i.e. who designs and influences language education policies and thus deals with language/linguistic rights, but i) who else can/will deal with language/linguistic rights in a more inclusive approach, and ii) how those who can/will deal with language/linguistic rights will succeed in doing it. According to the participants, for an educational policy drawn from language/linguistic rights in education, different actors and individuals at national and European levels must collaborate (cf. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice, parents, students, European bodies, etc.). This agrees with scientific evidence for the need for stakeholder synergy (Shohamy 2010; Tannenbaum and Shohamy 2023). We cannot, in this case, ignore the need for the active participation of children as (co-)designers of their school geography where they live out much of their daily lives (Lewis 2020), and consequently as essential actors for (more) just educational policies (see also Abebe & Biswas 2021), if such a perspective is indeed inscribed in their needs.

At a second level, it seems necessary to discuss or shift language/linguistic rights through a political lens (see Zembylas 2020). On this basis, we think about the possibilities for children to act as assertors of their rights and the rights of others. The dynamics of the movements in which children participate (Rogers 2018) can be part of the school geography (Lewis 2020), a school that can resist (linguistic) injustices and consider children's claim to the absolute, relative, and relational space (Harvey 1973) of the school. A similar logic is expressed by Tannenbaum and Shohamy (2023), who talk about the relationship between multimodality (objects, sounds, smells, etc.) and space through the lenses of “practiced, conceived, and lived space” (Lefebvre 1991 as quoted in Tannenbaum and Shohamy 2023). This is why we opt for a more visible link between children's rights and language/linguistic rights. This approach is also inscribed in the context of decolonized justice (Cunneen et al. 2023; McGuire 2023), which helps us to question different aspects of justice (see also Walzer 1983) and then different aspects of language/linguistic rights. We must, however, underline that in no case does social and linguistic justice come without the support of participatory planning (see Participatory Planning in Education, Unesco Guidelines).

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