

**Tangas, Pericles.** "Multimedia and Foreign Language Teaching: the Case of Greece". Στο: Grabe, Daniela & Zimmermann, Lisa (eds), Multimedia Applications in Education Conference Proceedings 2006. FH JOANNEUM, Graz, Austria, 2006, σσ. 139-48.

## **Multimedia and Foreign Language Teaching: the Case of Greece**

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**Key words:** *multimedia, foreign languages, Greek educational system*

### **Abstract:**

*New technologies and e-learning are believed to promote foreign language learning and plurilingualism within the E.U., thus contributing to the fulfilment of Europe's social, economic and cultural potential.*

*This paper presents multimedia applications and new technologies incorporated in the methodology of foreign language teaching in Greece. Within this context, certain techniques are highlighted, as they are implemented in the framework of the Crosscurricular Approach to foreign language teaching, with a view to increasing effectiveness and providing a more holistic and less inhibitive environment for learners.*

*In particular, indicative multimedia applications such as "Xenios" are presented in detail, along with the ways in which they can be used creatively in order to contribute to the aims of foreign language teaching. The advantage of a virtual environment is that learners relate to it more easily and therefore optimum conditions for learning are created.*

*The paper focuses on activities and platforms employed both in primary and secondary education, while it also presents the benefits of using multimedia applications for teaching foreign languages in higher education, with respect to the needs of different types of learners.*

## 1. Introduction

The incorporation of new technologies in foreign language teaching is constantly gaining momentum worldwide, following the increasing tendency to integrate computers and multimedia applications in education. It seems that foreign languages and computer technology can serve the same pedagogical aims. As Warschauer points out, “both English and Information Technology are tools to allow individuals to fully participate in society”.<sup>1</sup>

Professional discussion became more active in the early 1980s and the diversity of the ideas proposed led to the evolution of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Foreign language teaching is ideal for using multimedia technologies. Apart from computer software, the use of the video and DVD has facilitated teaching and turned it into a more meaningful and less tedious process. It seems that the traditional book can no longer play the role of the leading knowledge provider. In our age children are inundated with images and sounds, so the book seems restricted as a resource. This accounts for the eagerness students exhibit when they are allowed to operate in an interactive environment which is inherently friendly and accessible; just because it can be associated with entertainment, children do not feel “threatened” in any way. Instead of sitting in front of the teacher, having to pay attention and complete tasks, they simply interact with an intelligent companion they feel eager to explore and are not afraid to play with. That breaks the monotony of teacher-student or even student-student interaction in class. What is more, if used creatively, learners’ interaction with the computer can overcome the level of language use and contribute to language learning. In fact, this is one of the criteria cited by Chapelle for evaluating CALL. Besides language learning potential, the criteria that need to be met are: learner fit, meaning focus, authenticity, positive impact and practicality.<sup>2</sup> This paper presents the implementation of multimedia applications in the educational system of Greece in an attempt to infer the degree to which the above criteria are met.

## 2. ICT in the Greek educational system

In the Greek educational system, new technologies have started to be used mainly during the last decade or so, and more extensively after 2000, when the vast majority of Greek primary and secondary schools acquired computer laboratories and access to the Internet. The Greek Schools' Network (GSN) is the educational intranet of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs<sup>3</sup> which interlinks all schools and provides basic and advanced telematics services. Thus, it contributes to the creation of a new generation of educational communities, which takes advantage of the new Informatics and Communication Technologies in the educational procedure.

The implementation of the Greek Schools' Network is funded by the Framework Programme for the Information Society,<sup>4</sup> in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education as well as 12 Research Centres and Higher Education Institutions, specialized in network and Internet technologies.

The current design and implementation of the Greek Schools Network focuses on providing useful services to all members of the Primary and Secondary educational community and aims at fulfilling goals such as: Access to telecommunication and informatics services; digitized educational material and digital library services; distance learning, e-learning; opinion exchange and co-

operation, discussions, seminars; communication with European educational networks; educational opportunities for individuals with special needs.

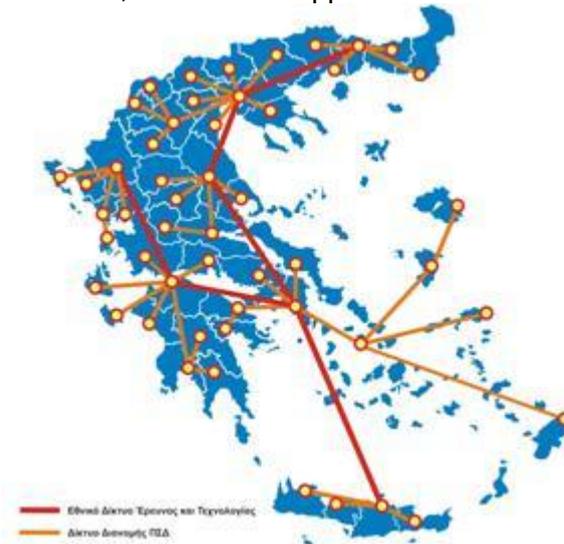


Figure 1: Greek Schools Network (<http://www.sch.gr>)

The Greek Schools Network is interconnected with the Greek Research and Technology Network (GRNET),<sup>5</sup> in seven main points (Athens, Thessaloniki, Patras, Heraclion, Larisa, Ioannina and Xanthi), using it as its core network. Network and computational equipment is installed in the capital of every prefecture, ensuring access of the prefecture's schools to the network and its services (distribution network). Finally, an access network connects the schools to the prefecture's access point.

The Greek Schools Network offers a wide range of services to its units and users. The most important of these are: automated registration procedure for educational staff and students - Users Administration Service; remote network access (dialup); e-mail, accessible through the POP3 and IMAP protocols, as well as the world wide web; e-mail lists; web portal, offering news services and personalized access to telecommunication and informatics services; web hosting for static and dynamic pages; wizards for automatic webpage creation; asynchronous distance learning, for hosting and distributing digitized lessons (e-learning); teleconference; video on Demand, delivering streaming educational multimedia material; live Internet transmission (webcasting) of various events; news and discussions (forums); electronic magazine; Personal Calendar, Personal Address Book; Directory Service; Voice over IP; Online statistics; Help-Desk.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. The educational platforms developed in Greece for foreign language teaching

As of 1996, the scientific and administrative services of the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs (the Pedagogical Institute and the Directorate for Secondary Education Studies), in co-operation with the Academic Research Institute on Computer Technology (CTI) have mobilized a significant social force (53 companies, 57 university units, 18 museums and research institutes, 385 schools, 5.500 teachers and 100.000 students) in an ambitious programme, the Odysseia - Hellenic Schools in the Information Society Programme (under the

Operational Programme for Education and Initial Vocational Training funded by the 2nd European Community Support Framework).<sup>7</sup>

The Odysseia Programme is founded on a comprehensive approach towards new technologies. Computer science is addressed in such a way, so that the children perceive it not only as an independent scientific domain, but also as a handy tool to be used every day in teaching, learning and communicating.

The Odysseia programme has created a critical mass of school communities in Secondary Education, which integrate new educational practices in the learning process.

The programme involves three basic lines of action: first, training and support for teachers of all specializations, provided by specially educated trainers; second, setting up the necessary infrastructure (fully equipped computer labs, connected to the Panhellenic School Network -- and technical support); third, development of new software and localization or adaptation of existing, international, exploratory and multi-disciplinary educational software.

The Odysseia Programme has developed, through a series of procedures for technological and pedagogical evaluation, a set of 50 educational software packages. It has also adapted another 17 internationally acknowledged educational software products that have been localized into Greek and adapted to the Greek curriculum. The educational software that can be used in the context of foreign language teaching is presented below:<sup>8</sup>

<b>SOFTWARE TITLE</b>	<b>TEACHER SPECIALIZATION</b>	<b>REFERENCE TO CURRICULUM</b>
AVAKIO E-SLATE	Mathematics, Physics, Language, Biology, Natural Sciences, English, French, German	Mathematics, History, Foreign Languages, Geography and Physics for Junior High and High School
EINBLICKE LERNPROGRAMM DEUTSCH, FOLGE 1,2,3*	German	German language for Junior High School and High School
ENGLISH DISCOVERIES*	English	English Language for Primary School, Junior High School & High School.
ERGASIAKA PERIVALLONTA (WORK ENVIRONMENTS)	All subjects	"Workplace Environments" for Grade A, 1st cycle of Technical and Vocational School - Areas: Art Applications, Electrical Engineering, Economics and Management, Agriculture, Food and Environment
POLYMESIKES MONOGRAFIES EPAGELMATON (MULTIMEDIA PROFESSION MONOGRAPHS)	All subjects	School Career Guidance for Grade A, High School.

TABLETOP JR & TABLETOP*_	For all subjects	An interdisciplinary platform - tool for understanding the concepts of collection, classification, processing and representation of data for all grades of Junior High School and Grades 5, 6 Primary School.
XENIOS	English, French, German	Foreign Languages (English, French, German) for Junior High School.
(*) Internationally acknowledged mature educational software localized or adapted to the Greek educational system.		

The most well-known interactive environment employed in Greece is Xenios (<http://xenios.cti.gr>). It was created by teachers of English and aims to support the learning process, assist teachers in their work in class and encourage them to communicate and co-operate with colleagues from other schools. It is ideal for group work in the computer lab and facilitates collaboration between different groups of learners.

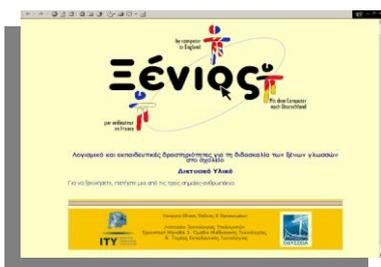


Figure 2: Xenios home page

Xenios has been developed by the Computer Technology Institute in collaboration with experts on ICT educational applications and foreign language teachers. It is a continuation of the Mentor project (1998-2000), an international partnership between UK, Belgium and Greece aiming to develop a European network for language learning using a combination of multimedia and Internet technology. Xenios (an E-Slate and on-line hybrid) is based on the Greek software and materials. It has been used by a number of foreign language teachers across Greece and is currently employed by the Hellenic Open University in the Master's programmes for foreign language teachers. (*"Education technology for English Language Teaching" & "Technology in the teaching of the French language"*).<sup>9</sup>

### 3.1 Description of Xenios

Xenios is a multi-faceted environment that includes educational software, simple and more complex exercises and activities, web sites from all over the world related to the culture of the relevant countries, as well as a web page for announcements of learners' activities or projects and a teacher's forum. Xenios is a combination of technologies and tools that have a different role and function. This means that they can be used in various ways, along with the

material that has been prepared, depending on the aims of each lesson. This diversity of interaction with the software also caters for the needs of different types of learners, thus providing more versatility in teaching and contributing to enhancing foreign language learning. At the same time, students acquire essential skills as they familiarize themselves with the benefits of working in a multimedia environment, while the wide range of available activities retains students' interest and contributes to increasing flexibility. Students can also communicate with their peers from other schools in order to exchange results of their work and form common projects.

Xenios consists mainly of 14 micro-worlds that have been weaved around the phases of a triple educational scenario:

	<b>ENGLISH</b>	<b>FRENCH</b>	<b>GERMAN</b>
<b>MICRO-WORLDS</b>	A journey across Europe	A journey across Europe	A journey across Europe
	The United Kingdom London and its sights	France Paris and its sights	Germany Köln and its sights
		Paris metro	Köln and its metro
	A birthday party	Treasure hunt in the Notre Dame	In the zoo

The internet is thematically integrated and the microworlds provide a basis for the interaction between learners and the computer as they are getting involved with the educational scenario. They offer exercises, tools and software, as well as digital material, such as images, maps, sound, and video. Besides being interactive, the micro-worlds are also exploratory and interdisciplinary, as they focus on the achievement of educational aims pertaining to different subjects and allow for the development of different skills.

The web part of Xenios is organized in a website and has descriptions of the activities, additional material for the micro-worlds and exercises related to each phase of the journey. On the initial page there are three language options: English, French, and German. By choosing one language and selecting from the relative menu, students can have access to the different parts of the web material. There is also supportive material explaining and outlining the various ways Xenios can be used creatively in class.<sup>10</sup>

Xenios is a complete educational approach for the teaching of foreign languages in schools for the following reasons: firstly, it combines the use of IT with language activities, taking into account students' different background, abilities or preferences; secondly, it helps to avoid repetition and is amenable to customization; thirdly, it can be thematically integrated in class, without creating a sense of fragmentation.

The web part of Xenios consists of the following components:<sup>11</sup>

**a. The journey**

It is structured around the different phases of the educational scenario.

**Flying to the U.K.**



Figure 3: Micro-world in E-Slate environment

By clicking on the above image, the message "Open this file from its current location" appears. Then you are connected to the Microworld-list of all links to the foreign language microworlds.

### Travelling in the U.K.



Figure 4: A virtual map of the U.K.



Figure 5: Welcome to London

*Links:*

Transportation, Accommodation, Sightseeing in London and the UK, British Museum, Westminster Abbey, Sherlock Holmes museum, Jorvik Viking Centre  
**Let's go out to dinner!** Finding a restaurant, Healthy nutrition, Restaurant reviews, Choosing from the menu, Perkins restaurants, English breakfast, English dishes & recipes, Preparing a recipe, Greek dishes, Preparing a birthday party, At the super market, At the bakery shop, At the greengrocer's, Cakes

#### **Entertainment & Sports**

**Music:** The Beatles, Musical Instruments, Brighton Philharmonic Orchestra

**Sports:** Football in England

#### **b. The Language Practice**

It offers exercises related to each phase of the journey. The skills practiced (by clicking on the relevant symbols) are: 🗣️ oral expression, 📝 written expression, 📖 reading comprehension, 🎧 listening comprehension, 📚 grammar, 📖 vocabulary.

#### **c. The skills**

This category is mainly addressed to the teacher and explains the skills that the different groups of exercises and activities aim to develop, i.e.:

Writing (Schriftlicher Ausdruck, Expression Ecrite)

Speaking (Mündlicher Ausdruck, Expression Orale)

Reading Comprehension (Leseverständnis, Comprehension Ecrite)

Listening Comprehension (Hörverständnis, Comprehension Orale)

Grammar (Grammatik, Grammaire)

Vocabulary (Vokabel, Vocabulaire)

**d. The link **Communication**** leads to a list of addresses, which can be used by students or teachers to contact each other by e-mail or use the forum to send their own suggestions, ask for assistance or even provide language activities designed by themselves.

Finally, there is a list of useful links to Internet sites where students and teachers can find additional material related to foreign language teaching.

Most of the activities provide a self-check option. There is also on-line Help, which illustrates the functionality of the material provided. Lastly, Xenios is supported by a website explaining and describing the software and the way it can be integrated in foreign language teaching.

An interesting example of building upon Xenios is proposed by Politou and Tsifa,<sup>12</sup> who suggest ways of planning a trip to different European countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal, Great Britain), starting from Thessaloniki, Greece. The project, besides exploiting Xenios, draws upon the experience of Greek schools that have participated in European programmes and aims at learners' familiarization with the culture of European countries. Students are also presented with worksheets with activities and exercises providing relevant web addresses with rich, authentic material and information about the countries they visit (for example, [www.romexplorer.com](http://www.romexplorer.com) or [www.red2000.com/spain/t-map](http://www.red2000.com/spain/t-map)). When they finally arrive in England, they visit Brighton, Bristol and Oxford and use the links available at the website of Xenios. The virtual tours of the galleries of the British Museum and Madam Tussaud's are of special interest. Similar activities, designed by foreign language teachers, are available on the support site (<http://xenios.cti.gr/support/download.htm>).

### **3.2 Technical characteristics**

Xenios consists of the web part and the micro-worlds in E-slate environment. Hyperlinks from E-slate are available not only to Xenios but also to other websites providing material for foreign language teaching. Xenios is linked to E-slate through a central micro-world which is linked to the various micro-worlds available, depending on the language the user selects.

Xenios combines two environments: the Web interface is on the central server, while E-slate and the micro-worlds are on the local computer (proxy server). E-slate began to be built in 1993 by the Computer Institute of Technology in co-operation with the Laboratory of Educational Technology of the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Athens. It has been financed by national and EU research funds. In addition to foreign languages, though, E-slate is also recommended for teaching Mathematics, History, Geography, and Physics, as the software components comprising its micro-worlds can be easily connected to each other in any combination. In this way, the user-teacher can compose the desired educational software or activity.<sup>13</sup>

Xenios is project-orientated and weaved around the different phases of the journey, which take place in a different setting: "at the airport", "at the hotel", etc.; so it actually exceeds the standard hourly lesson planning. Its philosophy aims at the attainment of the broader educational targets; besides, it does not only focus on language practice but also provides useful information about the country's culture, its geography, the customs and habits of its people, etc. It therefore falls within the scope of the crosscurricular approach to foreign language teaching. Finally, it offers both students and teachers the opportunity to familiarize themselves with IT, as well as encouraging learners to think critically and assume a more active role in class.

## **4. Multimedia and ICT in the foreign language curriculum**

### **4.1 Pedagogical aims**

Evidently, multimedia applications and Informatics as a subject can be easily combined with Foreign Language teaching, thus conforming to the pedagogical

objectives of the Crosscurricular Unified Curriculum of Informatics, which are to a great extent identical with those concerning foreign languages. The main aim is to develop learner autonomy in class, in a learner-centred approach that focuses on enhancing students' critical abilities and social skills, so as to teach them how to access information, "learn how to learn" and prepare for life-long learning that will improve their lives in the future. The "holistic" model pervades the methodology of teaching Informatics, focusing on the "diffusion" of Information Technology in the various subjects taught at school – including foreign languages. The primary purpose is that learners acquire the necessary knowledge by using Information and Communication Technologies as a tool. Students therefore learn through simulations, educational games, interactive multimedia and other software that is accompanied by the necessary books, projects, activities, and other supportive material. Publishing houses have taken the initiative to create additional material available on the Internet in order to assist foreign language teaching in Greek schools.<sup>14</sup>

The Internet is a seminal component in the teaching process. It provides students with immense opportunities to cultivate and develop their thought while learning how to find the information they need. Moreover, students are trained in group-work as they collaborate in order to complete a project. They appreciate the importance of dialogue and communication and may choose from a variety of means available (Word, Powerpoint, and also graphs, charts or multimedia) to present their work or their observations. In addition, they develop a code of ethics with regard to respecting others while working together in the laboratory and also respecting other people's rights to their work (copyright material), which may be available on the Internet. Thus, learners become gradually sensitized to the impact of IT on the contemporary world, on culture and people's relations and values.

It is particularly emphasized that the proper methodological approach is to motivate learners to discover the importance of using IT and acquire methodological skills while building upon existing knowledge and personal experiences. What is more, teachers ought to provide equal opportunities for participation to all students, boys and girls, as well as children with special needs, regardless of their social or national origin and background. Through constant encouragement to participate, students learn how to develop initiative and are assisted in their well-rounded development as young researchers. They learn how to access, evaluate and exploit the data at their disposal to construct or re-construct their own projects and finally envision their own ideas and ideals for the world and its future.

The common methodological approaches outlined in the Crosscurricular Approach to teaching Informatics and Foreign Languages in Greek schools (English, French, German and, recently, Italian) focus on developing students' analytic and synthetic skills while demonstrating in action the benefits of participating in problem-solving activities, in exploring, analysing, designing, and creating, in an ambience of mutual respect and co-operation. In addition, other common approaches, such as brainstorming, guided teaching, role-plays, case studies, etc., testify to the effectiveness of applying IT in the context of foreign language teaching. Finally, the IT Curriculum suggests that the process of assessment should aim at helping the teacher determine the extent to which the above-mentioned objectives have been achieved. It is also stated that students with special needs should be assessed with the same criteria as the rest of the class, with a view to focusing on their development in a holistic manner. Rather than discovering their weak points, emphasis is put on the pedagogical principles of encouragement and motivation. In general, assessment should be flexible, so

as to help integrate students with special needs in class, while assessing the degree to which they may need additional support in certain points.<sup>15</sup>

#### **4.2 Language exercises and activities**

In accordance with the Greek educational policy, the New Revised Unified Curriculum governing the teaching of foreign languages in Greek primary and secondary schools encourages the use of new technologies, software, video and the Internet as educational resources. Learners are initiated into the use of new technologies through various exercises and mainly through completing projects. In particular, common projects between schools from different areas or even countries are encouraged, as they necessitate interaction between students – and/or teachers (e-mail exchanges, surfing the Internet to find the necessary information, etc.). Such common projects have already been completed with the co-operation of Greek schools in the framework of the Comenius Programme (for instance, a school from Patras, in co-operation with a school from Copenhagen and a school from Bari participated in a project examining the contribution of the city's port to the local economy).

In the framework of developing multilingualism, which involves using the foreign along with the native language, students are assigned activities like the following: *Use the Internet and send e-mails to scientific organizations to collect information concerning environmental pollution in cities or protection from fires. Gather information about the way similar problems are dealt with in English, American or Australian cities and translate it into Greek. Work in groups to reach some conclusions or proposals and send them to the relevant Greek organizations, acting as responsible citizens.*

As stated above, emphasis is given on developing autonomy in learning. Thus, children are encouraged to “learn how to learn” while getting engaged in crosscurricular activities. In the framework of the foreign language lesson, students learn how to use computer software (e.g. dictionaries, Word processor or Excel to create charts) in order to be able to correct their mistakes while doing research on their own or as members of a team.

Another example of an activity that involves new technologies and aims at helping students to produce oral or written speech is the following:

*Surf the Internet to collect information about a British political or historical personality (for instance, Churchill). Write down the information commenting on his/her attitude during critical historical periods (like WWII or the Balkan wars). Use OHTs or a Powerpoint presentation to present your results in class.*<sup>16</sup>

Apart from the use of computers, teachers are also encouraged to use video cassettes or DVDs in class. Then they can ask students to turn an extract of a story they have watched (for instance, Aesop's Fables such as “The Cricket and the Ant” or “The Lion and the Mouse”) into pantomime. Shows of this kind are common both in public schools and in private language centres. Alternatively, children can watch a documentary in the foreign language (on kangaroos, for example) and then either write a short composition or make a drawing of their own (connection with Science and Art). The disadvantage of the video is, of course, that it is not interactive. Therefore, it is more passive than a CD-Rom or a multimedia package that calls for action on the user's part. In addition, the CD-Rom user needs to make choices at several points, while the fact that multimedia provide multi-sensory input definitely reinforces learning. Undoubtedly, one may find nowadays as many CD-ROMs and multimedia packages as DVDs that have been specially designed by the numerous Publishing Houses dealing with foreign language teaching materials. CD-ROMs involve a variety of multimedia, such as: elementary level exercises combining picture, text and sound (for instance, a

letter of the alphabet and an object or animal beginning with that letter, which is also being pronounced, while users have the option to repeat the word and record their own voice); at more advanced levels, more complex activities are used, like sentence/paragraph building, changing word order, problem-solving, etc.

We should also pinpoint the importance of using e-mail as a means of communication. Students are encouraged to send e-mail messages “to communicate with native speakers of the language in order to exchange information about a topic or play a game with children of their age from other countries”.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, they can exchange ideas, pictures, texts, etc., initiating each other into the culture of their country. This activity aims to help students to develop an appreciation of multilingualism and multiculturalism by getting in contact with peers from other countries.

The Tandem method is also useful and contributes to developing the skill of using the native along with the foreign language. For example, a Greek student sends an e-mail to a German student, who replies (also in Greek) and the Greek student corrects his/her mistakes, assuming the “teacher’s” role. Then the German student sends a message written in German. The Greek student replies in the foreign language and his/her mistakes are corrected by the German student.

Finally, interactive simulations are a vital part of learning. It is true that by *doing* things learners remember more than simply by listening or watching. Simulation activities can therefore help them to develop a more thorough and complete idea about learning.<sup>18</sup> Agentsheets is an environment which offers students the opportunity to form their own understanding, explore new ideas and share them with other users from all over the world (<http://www.agentsheets.com>).<sup>19</sup> An agentsheet is a grid that consists of agents interacting and appearing as images. It has been used by a variety of users, ranging from Primary school pupils to scientists, for creating a variety of simulations. It can be used in the context of foreign language teaching for creating a simulation of a social or historical event, in the context of crosscurricular activities that draw upon different school subjects. Students could use the foreign language to describe the activity or the event simulated.

## 5. Multimedia applications in higher education

There is a rapid trend towards integrating IT in foreign language teaching in higher education, as well. This began as early as fifteen years ago in some European countries, but in Greece it has gained momentum during the last decade and more intensively during the past five years. As a result, CALL is included in the undergraduate Programmes of Studies of the Foreign Language Departments (English, French, German, and Italian) of the Greek Universities and the Hellenic Open University (as an elective module for postgraduate students).

In 2000, the institutions of Higher Education (20 Universities and 14 Technological Educational Institutes) created the non-profit civil company “ACADEMIC NETWORK” (GUnet). The aims of the company are: the development, support and management of the academic network of Greek HEIs; the development of advanced network services and applications and the general improvement of the education and research processes; the provision of network services to its members and third parties (institutes, foundations) whose activities aim at serving research and education; the participation in developmental, educational and research programmes with regard to network technologies,

services and applications aiming at the maintenance of the academic network at the peak of technology; the development of collaborations with respective academic, research and educational networks of other countries.

GUnet has been involved in projects aiming at the development of advanced telematics services, digital content, synchronous and asynchronous tele-education services and the acquisition of know-how in the new technologies of telematics and networks by the members of the Network Operations Centres (NOC).<sup>20</sup>

In particular, asynchronous applications are standard “work packages” in projects funded by EU programmes, due to the benefits they provide and the extent to which they facilitate distance learning. In the framework of the project of revising the Departments’ Undergraduate Programmes of Studies, classroom notes in PDF form have been uploaded on the Departments’ sites at Epirus Institute of Technology,<sup>21</sup> so that students can have access to them from home by entering a student identification number. The online notes are the same as the ones used in class presentations and the purpose is to provide an alternative option for students who may miss classes occasionally and would like to download the material and study at their own space – and pace. Future plans involve the creation of online laboratory courses in HTML format so as to provide virtual lab sessions.

As Grabe puts it, studying in higher education “is largely voluntary and self regulated”.<sup>22</sup> It is essential therefore to provide students with alternative study options and tactics. The creation of online labs is also adopted in other courses in Greek HEIs, and is encouraged by the increasing trend to benefit from integrating multimedia applications in teaching. What can be perceived as a disadvantage, however, is that it is assumed students have access to computers and/or the Internet, which may not be the case for everyone, thus establishing discriminations and making some students feel disadvantaged.<sup>23</sup> In this particular case, “learning is technology-dependent”<sup>24</sup> – especially e-learning. Sometimes, even if students have a computer, they may still face difficulties in connecting with the internet or dealing with software and/or hardware problems. Finally, they often find it difficult and time-consuming to cope with the wealth of information available on websites, as it requires advanced reading skills to be able to summarise and evaluate the importance of what they read.

In addition to internet applications, audio-visual material and special videos and software are also employed successfully in the context of foreign language teaching in higher education. At the Department of Applied Foreign Languages in Management and Commerce<sup>25</sup> of Epirus Institute of Technology, which is the only Department of the Technological sector of Greek HEIs that offers in-depth studies in foreign languages (LSP-Languages for Specific Purposes), video-based courses are an essential part of the foreign language curriculum. Preparing students for effective presentations in the foreign language is assisted by the use of model presentations, as well as examples of business meetings and negotiations, accompanied by authentic practice tasks aiming at the development of communication strategies. As Brett explains, “multimedia may provide an environment rich in opportunities for learners to negotiate their understanding”.<sup>26</sup> For instance, video can be combined with meaning-focused tasks to be completed while watching and students can be presented with feedback on task success immediately. If, on the other hand, they choose to borrow and use video for self-study, the task becomes a learner-controlled process and help is necessary to enhance understanding; consequently, subtitles can also be provided and glossaries of definitions, which can act as back-up resources.

Multimedia therefore helps students to develop both their listening and speaking skills and it is worth repeating that they are ideal for autonomous learning.<sup>27</sup> In fact, self-instruction contributes greatly to the development of productive (oral) and receptive (aural) skills.<sup>28</sup> CD-ROMs are ideal for self-help because they have a vast storage capacity and also because they can be both interactive and learner-controlled. Apart from that, digital dictionaries in CD-ROMs are available at the Department's computer labs for extra practice, while students can improve their pronunciation with special audio material in the language labs. Furthermore, in translation courses students use software such as SYSTRAN or TRADOS, as well as material available on specific Internet websites, like for example, the official site of the European Commission Translation Service (<http://europa.eu.int/comm/translation>). An extensive list of links to sites providing resources and web-based practice material is also available at the Department's website. In both language and translation courses, finally, an interactive dictionary (such as wordpower, phrasebuilder or multimedia dictionary) is a veritable tool that truly enhances students' vocabulary.

Since language teaching is intertwined with content teaching, activities in the foreign language in the framework of management-related issues may also exploit more advanced software such as Business Plan. This has recently been the case in an optional course on developing "Entrepreneurship". Given the linguistic competence of students, language teaching is invariably combined with content teaching, in a form of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), although not to the extent or the form in which it is provided in schools. The aim of the foreign language courses taught at the Department is to simulate professional settings and circumstances and provide students with language practice in issues they may have to face in business environments, in the process of written or oral communication, participation in meetings and/or negotiations, telephone conversations and problem-solving. As a result, integrating multimedia in lessons is an illuminating experience, as students are presented with both good and bad examples of behaviour for analysis, while they are also working with the printed material (setting, background, roles, etc.) they are provided with by their instructor. As stated above, multimedia can be a valuable complementary companion to printed course material, without substituting class instruction. It should be emphasized that activities involving IT are equally motivating for instructors as well; they can therefore be extremely helpful as long as they are aligned with language objectives.<sup>29</sup>

## 6. Epilogue

The contribution of ICT and multimedia applications in foreign language teaching is essential. There may be no substitute for "talk and chalk" for the moment, but on the other hand, it is true to say that even if computers may never take the place of teachers, teachers who do not use new technologies will gradually be replaced by those who do. As Milliken and Barnes support, "initial conclusions about the viability and the value of developing more participatory and successful learning programmes utilising computer technology are encouraging".<sup>30</sup>

Thanks to the co-ordinated efforts of the Greek State and HEIs, the country has an adequate network allowing access of both schools and Universities to the Internet and a great number of services. This has also facilitated the teaching of foreign languages, while special software developed for that purpose has accelerated the process of integrating New Technologies in Curricula. The future is therefore promising and necessitates the change of attitude on the part of teachers as well, whose role is changing: in the learner-centred system they are

required to initiate learners into the process of discovering information – rather than acting as the sole source of information. The use of multimedia can enhance understanding, increase motivation and help students develop new learning strategies, as they can use the language as a means; thus, foreign language learning becomes a combined process of knowledge acquisition and skills development.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, using the internet enhances reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, while written communication is also promoted,<sup>32</sup> either between students or between teachers and educational communities in general. All in all, multimedia are gradually becoming a vital part of foreign language teaching because they provide an alternative, individualized setting for learners of all types, in a process of training, educating and entertaining.

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#### **Biography**

Pericles Tangas is Assistant Professor of English and Head of the Department of Applied Foreign Languages in Management and Commerce of Epirus Institute of Technology. He holds a PhD from the English Department of the University of Athens, Greece. In 1999 he received a scholarship for post-doctoral research. He has participated in research projects and international conferences. He currently teaches Foreign Language Methodology and English for Specific Purposes.