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Structural constraints and agentive responses: comparing two systems of Greek heritage language education in Sweden

Natalia Ganuza [a], Zoe Nikolaidou[b] and Maria Rydell[c]

[a]Department of Scandinavian Languages, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden; [b]Department of Culture and Education, Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden; [c]Department of Swedish Language and Multilingualism, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden

ABSTRACT

This study investigates two distinct ways of organising heritage language education within one national context. More specifically, we investigate the teaching of Greek in Sweden through: (a) mother tongue instruction provided by the national education system and (b) a complementary school run by a parental organisation. Drawing on Archer's morphogenetic approach (1995), where structure, culture and agency are seen as separate but interrelated analytical layers, we investigate key actors' agentive responses to structural and cultural enablements and constraints. The study includes a historical overview and a linguistic ethnography conducted in both contexts. The data encompass policy documents, classroom observations and interviews with teachers, board members, parents and students. The findings show that the educational contexts have different legal statuses and are governed at different policy levels (national vs. transnational), while sharing many structural constraints at the level of praxis, such as being based on voluntary participation, limited instruction time and inconvenient scheduling. However, the key actors navigate the constraints of each setting in different ways, thus pointing to distinctive differences between them. Ultimately, the study shows how both educational systems complement each other and serve important roles in supporting the maintenance and development of heritage language and culture in Sweden.

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Heritage language education; mother tongue instruction; complementary schools; Greek diaspora; structure and agency

Introduction

Sweden offers an interesting case for examining two distinct systems of heritage language education (henceforth HLE) within the same national context. In this article, we compare and discuss the structural, cultural and agential possibilities and limitations that the two systems offer to the teaching of Greek in Sweden, from a historical and contemporary perspective.

CONTACT Natalia Ganuza natalia.ganuza@nordiska.uu.se Department of Scandinavian Languages, Uppsala University, Box 527, SE-751 20 Uppsala, Sweden

Since the end of World War II, Sweden has been a country of immigration. Statistics Sweden (2024) estimates that about 27% of Sweden's population today has 'a foreign background,' that is, they were either born outside Sweden, or in Sweden to two parents who both originate from another country. In all societies characterised by migration, the issue of maintenance and development of heritage languages becomes a pertinent issue. The most common way of organising HLE from an international perspective is through community-run schools organised outside mainstream schooling. These are often referred to as 'complementary schools,' 'community schools' or 'heritage language schools' (e.g. Nordstrom, Cruickshank, and Li Bai 2024; Panagiotopoulou et al. 2019). Another possibility is to organise HLE through the mainstream school as part of the national curriculum (e.g. Ganuza and Hedman 2015; Ganuza and Hyltenstam 2020).

In this article, we focus on the case of Greek HLE in Sweden. Greeks began to migrate to Sweden on a larger scale in the 1960s and 1970s as labour migrants and political refugees. The economic crisis in Greece in early 2010s brought a new wave of Greek migrants to Sweden, diversifying the Greek student body. Even though Greeks have never been the largest migrant group in Sweden, they have always been active in the promotion and maintenance of Greek culture, language and religion (Kostoulas-Makrakis 1995). Since the 1970s, two distinct systems of Greek HLE have co-existed: (a) the teaching of Greek through so-called mother tongue instruction (henceforth MTI), an optional school subject offered within the national curriculum, governed and subsidised by the Swedish state; and (b) the teaching of Greek in complementary schools, run by parents outside mainstream schooling (henceforth referred to as Saturday schools, since they are often organised on Saturdays).

The establishment and implementation of state-funded MTI in Sweden has been the focus of a significant amount of previous research (for an overview, see Ganuza and Hyltenstam 2020). Internationally, Greek complementary schools have also been widely researched, with an emphasis on diverse approaches to supporting Greek identity, language, and cultural heritage, as well as the effects of new Greek migration patterns on HLE (for overviews, see, e.g. Cushing, Georgiou, and Karatsareas 2024; Karatsareas 2021; Lytra 2014; Panagiotopoulou et al. 2019). While these international studies provide valuable insights, research on complementary schools in Sweden remains limited. Nobody knows how many complementary schools currently operate in Sweden, in what languages, or how many students that regularly attend them. Little is also known about the contact points between MTI and the complementary schools, despite their long co-existence in Swedish society. This motivates the current study's comparative approach, and its focus on the structural enablements and limitations of each system, as well as how central actors perceive and respond to them.

Theoretical framework

For this endeavour, we use Margaret Archer's *Morphogenetic approach* (e.g. 1995, 2020) as an overarching theoretical and methodological framework (see also Bouchard 2017; Ganuza and Hedman 2015; Mirvahedi 2019 who use this framework in similar research contexts). In short, the morphogenetic approach relies ontologically on the pillars of *Critical Realism* (e.g. Bhaskar 1975/2008/1975/2008), endorsing 'a stratified ontology of the social order' (Archer 2020, 137), that is, it assumes that the world exists and extends beyond the individuals who live in it, and independently of what they may think about

it (ibid.). Furthermore, it views structure, culture, and agency as separate layers of social reality, each one having their distinct properties and causal powers (Archer 1995). Even though each layer is equally important, there is a temporal order between them. Structure and culture are seen as necessarily preceding the actions that may transform them, and exist a priori to agents, while structural and cultural elaboration necessarily postdate those actions, eventually leading either to transformation (morphogenesis) or to reproduction (morphostasis). The layers are seen as separate analytical entities, but they are also 'crucial for each other's formation, continuation and development' (Archer 2013 [1979]:xii). As a consequence, Archer claims that 'social structure is ultimately a human product' that 'shapes individuals and influences their interactions' (Archer 2010, 225).

According to the morphogenetic approach, both structure (the material) and culture (the ideational) thus provide certain pre-existing constraining and enabling influences upon human agency, which mediate agents' capacity to act. In this sense, the approach neither over- nor under-privileges the power of agency as an explanatory mechanism of change and reproduction. Essential to agency, according to Archer (e.g. 2007), is reflexivity, that is, agents' reflexive deliberations in relation to the structural enablements and constraints that surround them, and how these deliberations inform their decisions, and their capacity to take action. Briefly, she defines reflexivity as 'the regular exercise of the mental ability [of people] to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa' (Archer 2007, 4). Analyses of agents' deliberations as well as observations of their social behaviour can thus contribute to our understanding of agentive responses to structural forces, and to how social actions contribute to the reproduction or transformation of systems, for example, educational systems.

Aim and research questions

In accordance with the analytical dualism proposed by Archer's morphogenetic approach, the present study aims to illuminate the structural and cultural enablements and constraints of HLE in Sweden, as well as agents' (in particular teachers') capacities and motivations to actively shape the education given these ramifications. It does so by comparing two distinct forms of Greek HLE; MTI and the Greek Saturday school. The following three overarching research questions are addressed:

(1) What are the underlying structural and cultural mechanisms operating within and across these two HLE contexts, from a historical and contemporary perspective?
(2) Which enablements and constraints do they pose?
(3) How do agents (in particular teachers) perceive the agential space provided in each setting, and how does this influence their decisions and capabilities to take action?

In the findings, we address RQ1 and RQ2 in Part I, with a focus on structural enablements and constraints, and RQ3 in Part II, with a focus on human agency.

Methods and data

This linguistic ethnographic study relies on (a) a historical overview of the establishment and recent developments of Greek HLE in Sweden, (b) an analysis of relevant policy

documents, and (c) ethnographic fieldwork. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of how HLE policies and practices have continuously been shaped and redefined by the actors involved, and in response to the shifting educational and societal contexts.

The data consist of political documents and former research relating to the historical development of HLE in Sweden, policy documents regulating MTI and the Saturday school, respectively, and ethnographic data from both settings. The ethnographic data encompass interviews[1] with teachers (in total 14, 6 of which have experience of teaching Greek in both settings), parents (14), students (11), current and former members of the Saturday school's parental board (6), and the coordinator of Greek language education in the Northern parts of Europe. The data also include approximately 20 h of classrooms observations in Greek MTI, and about 40 h at the Saturday school. This includes observations of lessons with primary, secondary and upper secondary school students. Part I of the findings draws primarily on our synthesis of former research and our analyses of political and policy documents, while Part II draws on the ethnographic data, primarily the teacher interviews and our observations.

The ethnographic data are somewhat more focused on the Saturday school, due to several factors. Firstly, previous research in Sweden has primarily addressed MTI, with less attention given to complementary schools. Secondly, the project's comparative approach required input from individuals familiar with both settings, and they were more accessible through the Saturday school. Thirdly, one of the researchers (Nikolaidou) holds multiple roles within the Saturday school, facilitating access to the school. Her embedded position at the school allowed us to gain a more nuanced understanding of the practices and dynamics of the school, and how these have evolved over time.

All research participants have consented voluntarily to their involvement in the project, and they were informed that they could withdraw from it at any point.[2] For minors, we received consent from their legal guardians. The teachers were interviewed individually before we carried out the classroom observations, and follow-up interviews were conducted after the observations. Importantly, all the teachers in this study have Greek heritage and are qualified educators, with university-level teacher training from Greek universities and, for some of them, with further professional development in Sweden. Most of the teachers have experience of teaching both in Greece and in Sweden, and about half of them both in MTI and at the Saturday school. There is considerable variation in their teaching experiences, however. Some have extensive experience teaching Greek as a heritage language, having worked at the Saturday school for several years, while a few are novice teachers, for whom this is their first teaching position. Two of the teachers were seconded from Greece, and one teacher used to be seconded but is now locally employed. The seconded teachers have substantial experience teaching Greek in Greece, but relatively limited experience teaching Greek as a heritage language. To protect the teachers' anonymity, given the small number of Greek complementary schools in Sweden, we have refrained from providing further details about the individual teachers' backgrounds.

Data analysis

The data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2019). This is a qualitative methodological framework focused on identifying, analysing, and interpreting

patterns within the data. It emphasises reflexivity and fosters a dynamic interaction between the data and evolving theoretical understanding. The process typically involves familiarising oneself with the data, generating codes, identifying and refining themes, and ultimately presenting the themes in a coherent narrative.

For the coding process, we utilised ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software. In generating initial codes, we applied both deductive and inductive approaches. We began with predetermined codes based on our research focus, such as 'comparisons between MTI and the Saturday school,' 'financial/material resources,' 'collaborations between home and school,' and 'the role of language and culture,' and as we engaged more with the data, new codes such as 'free will,' 'resistance' and 'dealing with heterogeneity' emerged. We also created codes based on the study's theoretical framework, such as 'structural and cultural enablements and constraints,' 'reflexive deliberations,' and 'room for agency.' These themes guide the findings and the discussion.

The policy document analysis aimed to gain insights into how HLE is framed and justified in each setting, and how teaching methods and pedagogical goals are outlined. To deepen the exploration, we combined this policy analysis with reflexive thematic analysis, focusing on how the policies are experienced and interpreted by key actors. This approach enabled us to uncover not only how the policies are implemented in practice but also the actors' reflexive deliberations about the education, and how they exercise their agency, actively shaping and adapting the policies to fit their local contexts. Central to this analysis is the concept of recontextualisation, as described by Bernstein (1990). Recontextualisation refers to how policies or knowledge are transformed and adapted when transferred from formal policy frameworks to local educational settings. This process involves a dynamic interaction between structure and agency.

Findings

Part 1: Structural enablements and constraints of Greek HLE in Sweden

Historical overview and recent developments

In the 1970s, Sweden wanted to break with its earlier assimilationist position and started advocating official multicultural policies (Borevi 2012). These years were formative for policies concerning HLE (Salö et al. 2018). In 1977, the so-called *Home Language Reform* was passed, which constituted an important step in the foundation and organisation of state-funded MTI. With this reform, Sweden began to offer publicly funded HLE to children of migrants within the regular school system. The establishment of MTI also became an important symbol of the political and ideological shifts taking place at the time, while less attention was paid to the practical implications of the new reform (Ganuza and Hyltenstam 2020).

Driven by political and socioeconomic instability in Greece, along with a growing demand for labour in Sweden, Greeks began migrating to Sweden in larger numbers between the 1960s and 1970s (Economou 1971). Greece's economic recession after 2009 sparked a new wave of migration to Sweden, facilitated by EU legislation granting EU citizens and their families' freedom of movement and residence. This led to a diversification of the Greek student groups attending both MTI and the Saturday school (cf. Karatsareas 2021, for the UK). Today, an estimated 35,000 people of Greek origin live in

Sweden (Statistics Sweden 2024). From the beginning, Greeks were active in establishing associations to preserve Greek culture, language, and religion (Kostoulas-Makrakis 1995). The first Greek Saturday School was established in Stockholm in 1966, run by a parents' association.

Before the Greek recession, Greece had an extensive programme for subsidising Greek education abroad (Damanakis 2012). At the time, all teachers at the Saturday school in this study were seconded and paid by the Greek state (Kostoulas-Makrakis 1995). Following 2011, this support was sharply reduced (Damanakis 2012; Lytra 2014), forcing the school's parental board to take over teacher recruitment. Today, only two of the school's teachers are seconded from Greece, while the rest are recruited locally. These local teachers are paid hourly, with wages covered primarily by student fees. Despite the increased costs, a former board member described this shift as 'a clear improvement,' as it allowed for greater control over recruitment, enabling the selection of teachers with intercultural competence and 'Swedish pedagogy.'

Importantly, as this historical overview has shown, MTI and the Saturday school have always existed side-by-side in the Stockholm area. They have been complementary means of supporting children's maintenance and development of Greek as a heritage language, and many children have regularly been going to both.

In the last two decades, there has been significant changes in Sweden's position towards diversity and migration. After 2010, when the Sweden Democrats, a political party on the far right, entered the Swedish parliament, several parties have begun to shift in their attitudes towards migration. This has led both to stricter regulations of migration and a tendency to address it as a threat to the social cohesion of Swedish society (Milani 2020). Moreover, for some parties, MTI has become an important symbol of the supposedly outdated multicultural intentions of the earlier decades. As a result, state-funded MTI is disputed. There is, at the time of writing, a government issued commission to 'analyse if, and if so how, participation in MTI affects students' integration, school results and knowledge development.' (Dir. 2023:175, our translation). Furthermore, the commission should 'if needed suggest measures to ensure that mother tongue instruction does not have negative effects on students' integration or knowledge development in the Swedish language' (ibid.). These statements are symbolic of the changing attitudes towards MTI.

In addition, several significant changes have also affected the Saturday school recently. For decades, the municipality of Stockholm provided free access to a mainstream school's premises in the city centre. At the start of our project, the school was suddenly notified that its contract had been terminated, with no explanation given. After a brief period at a nearby school and a few months of online teaching, the school board found new premises, but now must pay rent. This is a short-term arrangement, requiring regular contract renewals. During this upheaval, the school has lost over 15% of its students, highlighting its vulnerable position despite its long history.

Legal, institutional and local frameworks

As argued in previous research, MTI has relatively strong legal and institutional support at the state level, especially if viewed from an international perspective (e.g. Ganuza and Hedman 2015; Salö et al. 2018). It is integrated as an autonomous subject in the national school curriculum and subsidised by the Swedish state. There are several legal policies at

the national level regulating the provision, access and content of MTI, for example, the Education Act (SFS 2010:800), the Ordinance for compulsory school (SFS 2011:185), the Curriculum for compulsory school, preschool class and school-age educare (Lgr22 2022), and the syllabi for MTI in different grade levels. The curriculum and the syllabi state the main objectives of MTI, the expected learning outcomes, the core content for each grade level, and the grading criteria (from grade 6 and onwards).

Notwithstanding this legal and institutional support, it is well-known that MTI suffers from persistent problems at the level of implementation, for example, unregulated and limited teaching time (often restricted to 40 min a week), inconvenient scheduling, and low status (e.g. Ganuza and Hedman 2015). For entitled students, MTI is optional. The provision and quality of MTI also differs largely between different parts of Sweden (SOU n.d.:n.d.), which is a result of the decentralised character of the Swedish education system. Even though the government has the overall authority over education, the responsibility at the level of organisation and practice lies with the municipality organiser, or the organiser of the independent school. Hence, while MTI is enabled through policies at the state level, it suffers from many limitations at the levels of organisation and praxis.

The Saturday school, on the other hand, receives no legal or institutional support from the Swedish state. As mentioned earlier, the Greek state supports the Saturday school financially by seconding two teachers from Greece and by subsidising textbooks. In Greece, the objectives and structure of Greek heritage language education are specified in two legal documents describing and defining the forms and the structure of Greek-language education abroad (Law 4415/2016 and Law 4692/2020). We view these documents as important transnational support for the Saturday school, although it varies greatly to what extent the documents are known by the interviewees in our study. Importantly, though, the laws govern the support from the Greek state and set the conditions for the secondment of teachers, for example, with regard to teaching hours and the minimum number of students that need to be enrolled in the education. This is information that the seconded teachers and the school board need to report annually to the Greek coordinator. Additionally, the amended law from 2020 states that complementary schools receiving posted teachers from Greece should submit a teaching programme approved by the Centre for Greek Language. Few of the teachers in our study seem to be aware of this requirement, but they partly align their teaching to the curriculum used in Ellinomathia, a certificate of attainment in Greek. This is a transnational assessment programme issued by the Centre for Greek Language and authorised by the Greek Ministry of Education, which evaluates students' Greek proficiency based on CEFR standards. The Saturday school does not have its own assessment standards or grading system, but it offers students from grade 3 and onwards the chance to prepare for this test. Roughly 10% of the students take it on a yearly basis.

At the local level, the Saturday school is regulated by the statutes of the parent's association, which were established by the general assembly in 2011 and have not been revised since. This ten-page document primarily defines the roles, authority, and responsibilities of the association and its board, with little or no mention of the educational content, learning outcomes or assessment.

At the level of praxis, the Saturday school has many of the same challenges as MTI, for example, limited teaching time (three hours a week), limited material resources, and

Table 1. Overview of the objectives of each context.

	MTI (Lgr22 2022, official English translation)	The Saturday School (the statutes ratified in 2011, our translation)
Stated aims	Mother tongue teaching shall aim to develop pupils' knowledge in and about their mother tongue. Through the teaching, pupils shall be given the opportunity to develop their spoken and written language skills so that they gain confidence in their language ability and can express themselves in different contexts and for different purposes. […] The teaching shall provide pupils with the conditions to develop their cultural identity and their plurilingualism. To achieve this, pupils shall be given the opportunity to develop their knowledge about cultures and areas in which their mother tongue is spoken. The teaching shall also contribute to the pupils developing a comparative approach to cultures and languages.	The aim of the association is: The correct and orderly administrative, organisational, and financial operation of the school and the association. The learning of the Greek language and the preservation and development of the Greek culture. The development of a close cooperation between the parents and the school. The gathering of resources for the proper functioning of the school and the Association.

being non-mandatory. However, unlike MTI, it gathers about 300 students each week at the same time, allowing for larger and more age-homogeneous groups, from preschool up and through upper secondary school. By comparison, the student groups in MTI are often small, sometimes limited to one or two students, who also tend to vary in ages and language competencies (see also Ganuza and Hedman 2015).

In Table 1, we present a comparison of some of the main objectives of MTI and the Saturday school, as these are stated in the Curriculum for compulsory school (Lgr22 2022) and the statutes of the Saturday school. The stated objectives provide an important framework for teachers in each context, which they need to consider, interpret, and recontextualise in their classrooms.

The description of the linguistic aims in MTI is similar to many other language subjects in Lgr22 (2022), thus aligning MTI with other subjects in the Swedish education system. As shown in Table 1, the objectives of MTI are set relatively high, while at the same time being generic and non-language specific. The same curriculum and syllabi apply to all languages taught through MTI. Lgr22 (2022) specifies the content that must be covered but provides no language- or cultural-specific guidelines for teachers, nor does it clarify *how* they should attain the objectives or what materials they should use. Hence, even though MTI is state-governed at the *national level*, teachers are given large agentive space at the *level of praxis* (see also Ganuza and Hedman 2015).

In comparison with Lgr22 (2022), the stated objectives of the Saturday school are brief, especially regarding the educational content. The statutes declare that the aim of the parents' association is to provide opportunities for 'The learning of the Greek language and the preservation and development of the Greek culture.' This statement presents language and culture as parallel, homogeneous entities that naturally co-exist and are equally important. Lgr22 (2022), by contrast, gives more prominence to different aspects of language than to culture. This is reflected in that language is presented before culture, and in the textual space and detail that each of them is given. Furthermore, Lgr22 (2022) presents 'culture' as pluralistic, since it mentions that students should 'be given the opportunity to develop their knowledge about

cultures and areas in which their mother tongue is spoken,' in plural. Lgr22 (2022) also states that MTI should contain a 'comparative approach to cultures and languages,' thus recognising that students are in contact with several languages and cultures simultaneously and may benefit from developing a comparative approach to them. However, the core content and grading criteria particularly highlight comparisons with Swedish and Sweden.

The statutes of the Saturday school, in contrast, focus only on Greek language and culture. As with Lgr22 (2022), however, the statutes are generic and do not specify which Greek language varieties to teach, which cultural aspects to prioritise, or which teaching methods to use. The teachers in the Saturday school are thus given large agentive space at the level of both policy and praxis.

An important difference between MTI and the Saturday school is that the statutes of the latter mainly concern the rights and obligations of the members of the association, and the administration and financial operation of the school. This is illustrated by the fact that two of the four objectives in Table 1 concern the securing of funds. In the interviews, most members of the school's parental board stressed that pedagogical aspects were not part of their responsibilities. For this, they lean on the teachers' knowledge and experiences.

Another important difference is the role assigned to community engagement, which highlights the community-driven nature of complementary schools (see also Karatsareas 2021; Lytra 2014). The Saturday school relies heavily on parents who are willing to contribute their time and serve on the school's board. Its operation also depends on the teachers' dedication of time and efforts, despite receiving symbolic salaries. In fact, many of the teachers are also parents of children attending the school, which strengthens their commitment to its operation.

Lastly, another difference between the two settings is the importance assigned to social functions. The Saturday school's statutes declare that one of its aims is to 'develop a close cooperation between the parents and the school.' Many of the people we have interviewed stress that the social aspects of the Saturday school 'are just as important as the educational ones,' (former board member), and that 'there is a strong sense of community in the Saturday school' (teacher). Similar statements about the importance of parent-school cooperation and social benefits are not made with respect to MTI.

To summarise, Part I has examined structural enablements and constraints of two systems of Greek HLE in Sweden: Greek MTI and the Greek Saturday school. Although MTI benefits from national legal support and operates within the Swedish education system, it faces many constraints at the level of implementation. The Saturday school, by contrast, operates outside Swedish state support. It is community-driven, relying on parents' voluntary involvement, in addition to financial and educational contributions from the Greek state. Despite lacking institutional backing, the Saturday school is able to organise larger and more cohesive student groups compared to MTI. A significant difference between the two systems lies in their objectives, as stated in key policy documents: The Saturday school is committed to preserving and cultivating Greek language and cultural heritage, whereas MTI, governed by a broad national curriculum, is more focused on fostering a pluralistic and comparative approach to languages and cultures.

Part II: Perceived agency and room to take action

As shown in Part I, there are significant differences between MTI and the Saturday school in terms of legal, institutional and local frameworks and support. At the same time, there are many similar constraints affecting the teachers' agentive space at the level of praxis. All teachers in our study mention time (limited teaching and planning time, as well as inconvenient scheduling) and a lack of material resources as constraining forces in both settings, consistent with earlier research findings (e.g. Ganuza and Hedman 2015; Thorpe, Arthur, and Souza 2018).

For the most part, the teachers in our study construct the lack of formal control in the Saturday school, in the manner of a prescribed curriculum or syllabus, as liberating, since it gives them the opportunity to choose freely what to teach, how to do it, and what materials to use. Sofia uses the word 'freedom,' when discussing the absence of a curriculum in the Saturday school, and Penelope says that it gives her a sense of being 'very autonomous,' while Aspasia exclaims that she 'loves working without a syllabus,' since she feels a syllabus restrains her from being spontaneous and responsive to children's immediate needs (Example 1).

Example 1.

1. I: In the Saturday school there is no syllabus, so how do you know what to do?
2. A: But oh so easy, I love it, sorry, I don't know if I should say this.
3. I: [laughs]
4. A: But I love working without a syllabus.
5. I: Okey, yes.
6. A: Sorry [laughs].
7. I: Yeah, but why then?
8. A: The syllabus makes me + cause I want to do what I want to, it's a spontaneous, you have to love your job [I: mm] you have to look at children and do things immediately, not follow.

The absence of a curriculum in the Saturday school is thus constructed as positive because it creates larger agentive space for the individual teacher. From their point of view, the absence of rigid structures fosters conditions for innovation, adaptability, and transformation in teaching practices, thereby facilitating morphogenesis (e.g. Archer 1995). This is interesting since one could argue that MTI also leaves teachers plenty of room for making individual decisions at the level of praxis (cf. Ganuza and Hedman 2015). The teachers in our study, however, do not seem to perceive it as equally enabling.

At the same time, Emilia, who teaches Greek in both MTI and the Saturday school, argues that MTI provides her with greater possibilities to adapt the content to her students' individual levels and needs because of the small student groups. She argues that this is more challenging when working with a group of twenty students, as she does in the Saturday school. Hence, Emilia attributes the ability to adapt her teaching to material conditions rather than whether she follows a prescribed curriculum. She views the material constraints in the Saturday school as hindering adaptation. She also stresses that she 'takes inspiration for her teaching from both contexts,' thus pointing to a dialectical relationship between MTI and the Saturday school. Sofia, who also teaches Greek in both contexts, likewise acknowledges that the MTI syllabus provides some content and structural support for her teaching in

the Saturday school, recontextualising its content across the two educational spaces to suit her aims and needs.

Implicit curricula

Several teachers in the Saturday school assert that they teach much the same way as they did in Greece: 'you do it a bit as in Greece, with the same routines' (Aspasia); 'in the Saturday school we work with books that I have also worked with in Greece, so I can rely on the syllabus and the curriculum of Greece, with some changes' (Julia). These comments suggest that some teachers turn to the Greek curriculum, and to their past teaching experiences in Greece, for curricular support.

For many of the teachers at the Saturday school, especially those teaching the earlier grades, the textbooks from Greece also direct and constrain their teaching (see Example 2):

Example 2.

1. C: Oh I feel that uh we are following the book a lot [I: mhm] uh but I guess this is something that has to do with the primary uh school and I think that's a little bit Greek # from the Greek part I don't know how the Swedish teachers work but in Greece usually in primary you are following the book, the chapters.
   […]
2. I: But you don't have a like a curriculum or syllabus that you have to follow, right?
3. C: No because it's just Greek language # I just follow # the book.
4. I: So the book sort of becomes a syllabus right?
5. C: Yeah exactly, that's how I feel.

As Christina confirms in Example 2, the textbooks, authorised and subsidised by the Greek state, come to function as a form of implicit syllabus. Our classroom observations corroborate this. Even though many of the teachers were critical of the textbooks, talking about them as outdated and as not reflecting the experiences of Greek students in Sweden, our observations showed that they nevertheless tended to follow them closely during lessons. This reliance on textbooks is probably partly influenced by primary education in Greece, as Christina suggests ('I think that's a little bit Greek,' see Example 2). In Greece, the educational system is centralised, and each subject and grade prescribe teachers to use certain textbooks. The continued use of these textbooks in the Saturday school, along with the reproduction of traditional teaching practices from the Greek education system, limit the possibilities for structural elaboration and change (Archer 2010). However, the reliance on the books is likely also an effect of the limited planning time that teachers have (30 min per week). On the other hand, our observations in MTI indicate that the teachers rely less on textbooks there, despite having even more limited teaching time, often turning instead to online resources tailored to their students' varied proficiency levels, interests, and needs.

As mentioned earlier, yet another form of curriculum exists through the teachers' use of Ellinomathia (the Certificate of Attainment in Greek, see Part I) and its standard proficiency criteria. The test is widely known among the teachers at the Saturday school, and the Greek Ministry of Education promotes its use and uses it as criteria for the quality assessment of Greek complementary schools abroad (Law 4415/2016). Several of the teachers in our study report that they use the proficiency criteria as one of the foundations

for their instruction at different grade levels in the Saturday school, and Sofia, for example, reports that she uses these criteria as a content guide in MTI as well (Example 3).

Example 3.

1. S: I see what they do in Ellinomathia and I adjust my material to these instructions or directives you could say.
2. I: And all the older children do they want to take the test?
3. S: No but it helps me be more structured because these tests they are adjusted to oral communication, written communication and reading so I adjust to their level for example, they could do these things so I do them.
4. I: Can you use it in MTI as well?
5. S: I do.
6. I: You do.
7. S: Yes, they are really good directives and I mean this is actually, a type of curriculum for Greek as a mother tongue or as a second language, so I use these instructions and they are very good they are adjusted they are the same thing as a curriculum […].

Although Sofia previously described the absence of a curriculum in the Saturday school as liberating, she views Ellinomathia as 'really good directives' that help her 'be more structured.' She further notes that the proficiency criteria align with the 'central content' of the MTI curriculum, allowing her to also use them when planning her MTI lessons. She also recognises that the directives for Ellinomathia function as 'a type of curriculum' in both educational settings, as she recontextualises them to fit her teaching practices and to structure her lessons in both contexts. In this case, the structural framework shaping one education context provides the foundation for the teacher's agentive actions in the other context. Once again, MTI and the Saturday school are thus presented as being in a dialectical relationship.

As shown in this section, the Greek state exerts relatively strong influence over the content and structure of the teaching in the Saturday school despite it not being regulated or mandatory. Although one could argue that the teachers' agentive space is largely unlimited at the level of policy, it becomes relatively constrained at the level of praxis. The teachers' reliance on previous experiences, methods and practices from the Greek education system, in addition to their use of the Greek textbooks and the Ellinomathia, become mechanisms of recontextualisation and continued reproduction of traditional Greek educational practices, fostering morphostasis (Archer 1995). Recently, however, several of the teachers have decided to go against previous arrangements in that they have ordered textbooks from Greece that are neither authorised nor subsidised by the Greek state. This testifies to the potential for morphogenesis alongside forces of morphostasis, since the teachers can exercise their agency to challenge established practices and introduce resources that better meet the local needs of their students.

In general, the teachers we have observed in both MTI and the Saturday school tend to be somewhat more flexible when teaching the former, in terms of their choices of content, methods and teaching materials. In MTI, they adapt these more to the individual needs of their students. In this sense, they embrace and recontextualise one of the central pillars of the Swedish Education Act, which is to take into account students' 'different needs,' and to give support and stimulation so that each student can develop as much as possible (SFS 2010:800, Ch.1, Section 4). The teachers' actions in MTI thus tend to lead to the recontextualisation and continued reproduction of Swedish educational policies, while they are less reliant on traditional Greek educational practices compared to when they teach at the Saturday school.

Comparative approach

As noted in Part I, the national Swedish curriculum stipulates that MTI should contain a 'comparative approach to cultures and languages.' In the investigated Saturday school, there are no formal requirements to make comparisons with Swedish and Sweden. Instead, the statutes declare that its education should focus on the maintenance and development of Greek language and culture, emphasising continuity rather than comparison. Teachers in both settings recognise this distinction, as highlighted by Emilia in Example 4, who views the comparative dimension as one of the most significant differences between MTI and the Saturday school.

Example 4.

1. I: What's like the biggest difference, in the aims that you formulate or how they are formulated?
2. E: Um, I would say that, for example, we don't have this comparison with Swedish.
3. I: No?
4. E: Yes or we talk, we do work with different texts or with traditions, um, you could say that we make comparisons of course since it's a Greek school in Sweden [I: mm] but it's not like, um, mandatory to talk about it […] but I think it's more similar to Greece than to Sweden.
5. I: And you think MTI is more similar to Sweden or?
6. E: It is [I: mm] um yeah, it is according to the Swedish curriculum.
7. I: But this that you said [% earlier] with like geography and traditions and such doesn't it also exist in MTI?
8. E: It does, but always in comparison with Swedish.

By stating that culture should be taken up 'always in comparison with Sweden,' Emilia shows how she interprets and recontextualises the MTI policy. Her words reflect the broader differences in the cultural and linguistic goals of each context, as well as the ways in which each setting prepares students to understand and negotiate their dual identities.

Dimitra, who was relatively new to teaching MTI, was also cognisant of the comparative dimension that is central to MTI policy. In Example 5, she points out that while celebrations of national holidays, like March 25th (the Greek Independence Day), are probably core components of cultural education in the Saturday school, students in MTI may not engage with them as much. Such celebrations might even be a 'red line' for some students, she argues, underlining the possibly loaded nature of incorporating aspects of culture in MTI.

Example 5.

1. D: It's tricky because, theoretically, there should be a comparison of cultures – not exactly a comparison, but to integrate a bit of Swedish culture with what you believe exists in Greek culture, uh, how it's celebrated here.
2. I: Mm.
3. D: Something like that.
4. I: Yes.
5. D: Uh, now, um, the national holiday is approaching, March 25th. There are kids who don't want to celebrate it, so it's a bit of a, um, I guess you could say a red line? Uh, whereas I imagine in the Saturday school, they will celebrate it, right?

The MTI syllabus drives teachers to navigate these possible tensions and to accommodate their teaching to students who may feel less connected to Greek traditions.

In conclusion, the comparative approach in MTI, as mandated by the curriculum, shapes the education that students receive. While MTI promotes structured comparisons between Greek and Swedish languages and cultures, the Saturday school prioritises linguistic and cultural continuity, with a primary focus on preserving and promoting Greek language and Greek culture. Teachers operating in both contexts are keenly

aware of these policy differences, and recontextualise them into their teaching to fit the perceived educational goals of each setting.

Language and culture

The way that language and culture are treated and positioned in relation to each other in policy emerged as another important difference between MTI and the Saturday school in Part 1. Although language and culture are indeed included and made relevant in the regulatory documents of both contexts, the statutes of the Saturday school give culture more weight. Similar patterns emerge in the interviews and the observational data. Many of the teachers, parents and students emphasised that cultural aspects are central to the education offered at the Saturday school, and an important rationale for its existence. When they spoke about MTI, cultural aspects did not figure as prominently. Teacher Sofia, for example, claims that she works much more with culture, traditions and festivities in her teaching at the Saturday school than she does in MTI: 'in the Saturday school it is mostly, more culture you could say […] for example, we work with national days and these kinds of things, traditions, which we don't do so much in MTI.' She motivates this decision, for example, by pointing to the statutes, where promoting Greek culture is an explicit goal (see Table 1, Part 1). Sofia thus recontexualises cultural education and national celebrations as central and recurring features of the Saturday school, while she has a more cautious and selective approach to incorporating such elements in MTI, in similarity to Dimitra in Example 5.

Moreover, the Saturday school has had a long-standing tradition of celebrating national and festival holidays through performances held on school grounds. In the old premises, the entire school community, including parents and other guests, could gather in the shared auditorium for these festivities, implying that parents constitute one of the target groups for the school. This is no longer feasible to the same extent in the new premises, which has opened opportunities for change. For instance, our recent classroom observations showed that older students, along with their teachers, exhibited less interest in the traditional forms of celebrating national days, such as citing poems and reading texts about Greece's involvement in World War II. Instead, they explored alternative ways of commemoration. In one classroom, students proposed the idea of visiting the Swedish Holocaust Museum in recognition of the national day. In another, they decided to create presentations on the contributions of women during World War II and on how animals were used as carriers and guards during the war. According to the teachers, such initiatives have not been observed previously. This reflects possibilities for change (i.e. morphogenesis, Archer 1995), and demonstrates how the increasingly limiting material conditions in the Saturday school have created opportunities for the teachers to make the cultural education more responsive to the interests and needs of their students.

In conclusion, data from the policy documents, the interviews and the classroom observations all highlight important distinctions between MTI and the Saturday school with regard to the role and prominence assigned to culture.

Concluding remarks

This study has explored the co-existence of two distinct, but interrelated, systems of Greek HLE in Sweden, and the structural enablements and constraints of each of them. As our case in point, we have examined publicly-funded Greek MTI offered through the national

education system and a community-run Greek Saturday school. We have paid attention to the ways that policies are recontextualised in the teachers' reflections and practices, and how they respond to the perceived structural forces of each context (cf. Mirvahedi 2019). As our comparative analysis shows, the two educational systems are structured, governed and supported at different levels of policy: MTI at the national and local level and the Saturday school at the transnational and local level. An important difference from a policy perspective is that the Swedish Education Act (SFS 2010:800) grants students the right to MTI (under certain conditions) all over Sweden, free of charge, whereas community run complementary schools, such as the Saturday school, tend to be restricted to the larger metropolitan areas and dependent on student fees as well as strong local community engagement (see also Reath Reath Warren 2017). The legal status of MTI provides a form of stability and recognition, whereas the lack of official status in the host country contributes to the marginalisation and vulnerability of the Saturday school (cf. Nordström and Jung 2022). At the same time, however, its dependence on community engagement enables more room for agency compared to MTI.

Educational systems are structured in the past but continue to exercise causal powers in the present (Archer 2013 [1979]). The existence of formal curricular requirements, alongside many limitations at the level of praxis, govern and shape the content and practices we have observed in MTI. The teachers in our study engage in reflexive deliberations (Archer 2007) about how they are still able to adapt their teaching to accommodate students' individual needs, some claiming that the small student groups even facilitate this. In the Saturday school, the teachers are not formally governed by a curriculum, but in practice, they tend to follow the guidelines provided by the Ellinomathia and the state-subsidised books. Although the Greek state (Law 4692/2020) requests that complementary schools should submit an approved teaching programme in order to receive seconded teachers, this requirement does not seem to be central for the teachers or board members in our study, neither is it formally enforced nor monitored by the Greek state. The teachers are impacted, however, by material limitations similar to those in MTI, the most important being lack of time and resources. The instability caused by the school's premises has also been a significantly constraining factor during the past two years.

An important difference between the two settings concerns the influence of the Greek state. As shown in the findings, the Greek state takes an interest in supporting Greek education abroad. The seconded teachers, the authorised textbooks, the teachers' reliance on their previous experiences, and the Ellinomathia are all mechanisms of Greek state influence in the Saturday school, and vehicles for the reproduction of dominant ideas about Greek language, culture and education (see similar arguments in Lytra 2014). The influence of the Greek education system is also visible in teachers, parents and students' expectations that the teaching at the Saturday school should follow patterns typical in the Greek education system, unlike the expectations they have for MTI. Hence, even though the teachers have a high degree of freedom to shape their teaching at the Saturday school from a policy perspective, their expectations, motivations and actions tend to lead them to reproducing traditional Greek teaching practices. These become important factors in the process of morphostasis (e.g. Archer 2010). The lack of formal control, however, also allows for individual variation. Some teachers go against the patterns of reproduction, for example, by actively choosing not to use the state-

authorised textbooks, or by allowing changes in how cultural events are celebrated. MTI, on the other hand, is mainly anchored in Swedish state policy and permeated by ideas dominant in Swedish education. These differences between the two systems of Greek HLE are clearly visible in our ethnographic data, despite the fact that we have followed the same teachers in both contexts.

The vulnerability of both MTI and the Saturday school is a key challenge for the sustainability of Greek HLE in Sweden. The structural challenges faced by the Saturday school may have long-term effects on its existence, organisation and teaching practices. However, the school's vulnerability also fosters strong engagement from the local community (see also Lytra 2014). The future of MTI is likewise more uncertain than ever, if one contemplates the increasingly polarised political discussions about migration and integration in Sweden, and the disputes over whether the state should continue subsidising MTI. As of yet, however, the teachers in our study do not seem to be directly affected by these forces. They do not explicitly consider these aspects when deliberating about their possibilities to exert agency in MTI.

As argued by Archer (2013 [1979]), different educational systems create different vested interests. An observed difference between the two contexts is the importance given to the teaching of culture. This can be understood as a response to the material and social conditions in which the two systems of HLE have emerged and operate. The sense of community fostered by gathering in a physical space in the Saturday school helps to preserve the cultural practices that are central to the school's mission. However, as our classroom observations have shown, older students' declining interest in traditional celebrations of national holidays lead teachers to explore alternative ways of commemorating historical events. This shift points to an agentive space for teachers and students leading to a possible broader cultural elaboration, where new forms of engagement with history and identity are emerging to meet the changing interests and values of students. This is similar to the exploratory ways of teaching language and culture observed in Greek complementary schools in the UK, in response to teachers and students' changed demands and expectations (e.g. Karatsareas 2021). The teaching of culture thus both represents reproduction (i.e. morphostasis, by placing importance on cultural events and maintaining the importance of teaching culture) and transformation (i.e. morphogenesis, teaching culture in new ways).

Notwithstanding important structural differences, our study also shows important contact points and similarities between MTI and the Saturday school. The movement of key actors, ideas and practices between them demonstrate their interconnectedness and complementarity. As argued previously, they share many structural and material challenges, such as limited instructional time, inconvenient scheduling, etc. Yet, the participants in our study tend to navigate these constraints in different ways, revealing the distinctive features of each setting. Hence, the two HLE systems each serve important roles in supporting the maintenance and development of heritage language and culture in Sweden, but in different ways.

Complementary schools in Sweden have received limited scholarly attention in previous research, as have the contact points, similarities and divergences between community-run complementary schools and state-funded MTI. The current study has addressed this research gap. A limitation in terms of its generalisability is the sole focus on Greek HLE, and on one complementary school in particular, a gap that we hope to bridge

over in the future. Furthermore, while our data includes insights from parents and students, their voices have not been highlighted in the current analyses. We will address this limitation in future publications, incorporating their perspectives to offer further insights on the complexity of heritage language education in Sweden. It also remains to be seen how both forms of HLE, and the dynamics between them, will be affected by the current developments in Swedish politics.

Notes

1. Interviews were conducted in Swedish, Greek and English, depending on the interviewees' language preferences and the researchers' language skills. In the findings, all interview extracts are presented in English.
2. An application for ethical review was sent to the Swedish Ethical Review Authority, who waived the requirement for approval for this project (Dnr: 2023-01466-01).

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ORCID

Natalia Ganuza http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0444-2207

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