

THE D.J. GEORGACAS' MODERN GREEK-ENGLISH DICTIONARY

J.N. KAZAZIS

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki/Centre for the Greek Language

Dear colleagues and delegates, I've decided to speak in Greek after all and I will start with a word or two about the Georgacas Archive.

1. THE GEORGACAS' ARCHIVE

The story of how it was put together is by no means unknown, but you'll excuse me if, as a former student of Professor Georgacas', I remind you of some of its more edifying points. Dimitrios Georgacas (1908-1990) was one of Hatzidakis' most brilliant students. After further education in Germany, mainly under Schwyzer, and thirteen years' successful service compiling the Academy's *Historical Dictionary*, he was already a distinguished professor in America when, in 1961, the American Office of Education commissioned him to produce a large-format Greek-English dictionary. Setting aside his own research project, which covered the Greek language from Hellenistic *Koine* to modern Greek idioms, he requested a period of unpaid leave from his university and set about excerpting a selection of basic works of contemporary Greek literature.

With a dozen typists tirelessly pounding the keyboards in the offices in Philothei (supplied by a young politician by the name of Andreas Papandreou), within twenty-seven months Georgacas had put together his first, small collection of linguistic material sourced from modern Greek literature. His funding dried up at this point and he went back to America. It was then, as he wrote in an autobiographical note in 1976:

I unhesitatingly, obstinately, decided to continue with the project and base it on my own, large-scale plan, governed by strict scientific criteria and specifications. After all, how could I compile an abridged dictionary, albeit to serve the needs of everyday communication, without first putting together a complete dictionary of a language that was, moreover, still in a state of diglossia, not to mention state persecution?

It should be noted, I might add, that it would have been just about impossible to develop, so opportunely and prophetically in 1960, the broad but consistent schedule of excerpting works in cultivated standard modern Greek that Geor-

gacas immediately and zealously embarked upon, had it not been for two factors: his steadfast belief in the assimilatory powers of a Demotic with very strong, but quite flexible boundaries; and his ideologically impartial conviction that the end of diglossia was at hand, and indeed approaching much faster than most people realised. Living far away from a country whose linguistic partisanship he was very familiar with, he was optimistic that, despite the transient, fabricated tensions, Demotic would eventually emerge victorious from the process of political and cultural renewal that the dawning 60s promised. And I don't think he was wrong. Within a decade, assisted by the recent invention of the photocopier, most of the second, large collection of Greek literary material had been put together. And in the late 60s work began on the dictionary in the North Dakota Lexicographical Centre, with a small, hard-working staff (I spent eleven months in that environment, and it taught me a lot) and funding from America's largest federal funding organisation, the newly established National Endowment for the Humanities. The funding, which, with some interruptions, continued until 1987, totalled the equivalent of 300 million drachmas (880,400 Euro). But it's my belief that all that toil could never be repeated, nor could such a result be achieved again, despite all the promises of new technology, which, although it certainly makes it easier to search even the longest texts, nonetheless simply scans everything mechanically and indiscriminately.

Having been supplemented over and over again, the Archive now consists of two-and-a-half million index-cards, making it the largest known Greek corpus of its kind. But the most important factor is not its size but the fact that it is so representative, and also the degree of processing it has undergone. It includes material from 200 years (the last two centuries) of literary sources, with special emphasis on the last decades of the twentieth century, and reflects the wide range of fields and uses of the language and its different levels. It has been classified, it has been homogenised and fully indexed, and essentially it incorporates two virtual dictionaries: an orthographical dictionary and an etymological dictionary. I should point out, for the benefit of our non-Greek friends, that at present there are no etymological and orthographical dictionaries of modern Greek based on excerpted works of literature. The Archive is accompanied by a working library of 7,000 volumes of literary, linguistic, and other works. I shall not go into more detail. But I can't resist the temptation to add that this precious Archive and library arrived as the gift of Barbara Georgacas, widow and close colleague of the professor, in Thessaloniki in November 1996 and was housed in the elegant, modern premises of the Centre for the Greek Language, which the Mayor and the Town Council of Kalamaria made available with timely and rare generosity. When, six months later, in April 1997, rains of unusual intensity flooded 75 per cent of the city of Grand Forks, the water destroyed the store-

rooms and medical laboratories of the University of North Dakota and also reached the basement area in which the Georgacas' Archive had been stored for years. But the Archive was no longer there. After spending thirty years at that most hospitable university, it had made it back home.

2. THE GEORGACAS' DICTIONARY

I shall confine myself to four remarks.

1. With the help of his staff, Georgacas managed to compile only the letter "A" of the Greek-English Dictionary, amounting to about one sixth of the entire work. On his death he left behind a typescript of 7,000 pages, which the President and the Board of the Centre for the Greek Language promptly decided to publish in large format. The cost, which proved considerable, was to be met by the Ministry of Education, with extra funding from the Foundation for Hellenic Culture and the Minister of Culture, who is the only Greek in the entire country to enjoy the privilege, week in, week out, of winning on the national Lottery without actually gambling – which means that culture wins too. The dictionary is already being printed in New York by Aris Caratzas, a publisher experienced in meeting the demands of high-quality bilingual publications. And most important of all, the typeset section is simultaneously being converted into a Data Base, and the entire dictionary will be accessible on the Internet.

2. From the advance publication of parts of the Greek-English dictionary in the periodicals *Orbis* and *Mandatoforos*, and from the wide circulation of the existing typescript among specialists, the unusually high standard of this dictionary has long been apparent. There are three parts to each article: a complete typological part, an analytical semantic part, and a brief etymological and historical part. In the typological part, the Centre for the Greek Language has added only the phonetic rendering of the entries, using the International Phonetic Alphabet (a task assumed by our associate Dr. Roula Tsokalidou). The semantic analysis gives only the meanings attested in the texts themselves, eschewing tautological or "etymological" explanations along the lines of "occurrence = that which occurs". Usage and register are meticulously recorded, and everything is documented with authentic quotations from the literary corpus – rather more quotations, some might say, than are strictly necessary. The historical and etymological section not only x-rays the structure of even the commonest word, but also traces its history through earlier stages of its own language or those of neighbouring peoples if it happens to be a loanword. As for neologisms, the so-called borrowing from other European languages of words with Greek components or simply a Greek etymon, they too are recorded to their true extent and dated, when possible, so precisely as to leave no room for any of the fallacies and misapprehensions about our own language that have lately become endemic in Greece.

3. The features that indicate that the dictionary is meant to be used as a standard international reference dictionary of modern Greek are in fact the same as what one would expect of a national dictionary, apart from the language in which the *interpretamenta* are written. Namely: the grand scale of the work; the fact that the definitions are illustrated not with arbitrary material, but with material taken from a corpus of texts; and the combination of an analytical synchronic linguistic treatment and a diachronic outline. Georgacas was above all an outstanding etymologist and had produced many notable studies on the subject (Kazazis 1991), so it is not surprising that, even today, despite their brevity, the etymological parts of the dictionary represent what we call the state of the art. Lastly, the choice of English for the definitions gives the dictionary a wider reach and facilitates the learning and the spread of Greek wherever there is a demand for it.

4. The long-term plans of an establishment like the Centre for the Greek Language, which has shown that it can both have visions and realise them, necessarily include converting the Georgacas' Archive into a structured digital Data Base so that it can be used as widely as possible for educational purposes and research (I have learnt a lot about this today from our colleagues), supplementing it with more texts (an, albeit small, corpus of complete texts), and above all completing the compilation of the big dictionary with the help, if possible, of Greek and foreign experts.

I conclude by expressing the hope that today's conference will help to promote the spirit of collaboration among Greek-language lexicographers. Thank you.

Translation DEBORAH WHITEHOUSE

References

- KAZAZIS, J.N. 1991. Δημήτριος Ι. Γεωργακάς (1908-1990). In *Λεξικογραφικόν Δελτίον* of the Academy of Athens, vol. XVII.