Exhibitions at the service of Parliaments: The case of "Glossopolis"

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1. Introduction

If I were to use a metaphor to describe what a library -or any cultural organization for that matter- looks like during the preparation of an exhibition, I think you agree with me that an apt metaphor would be that of a beehive, swarming with activity, until everything is put in place and the long-awaited day of the opening arrives.

But what visitors see at the opening is merely the tip of the iceberg. During the "beehive period" that I've just described, there is a whole amount of research, documentation, selection and preservation/conservation of the holdings to be displayed, coupled with experimentation with new museological practices, in order to create updated and enriched content that casts a critical glance at the past and the present.

Undoubtedly, exhibitions also provide an ideal framework for extroversion, openness, and transparency, fostering collaboration and networking with other public and private cultural bodies.

Overall, they form a powerful tool of cultural innovation, promoting reflection upon one's own collections and archives and sharing of our cultural heritage.

2. Exhibitions at the service of the Hellenic Parliament

The Library of the Hellenic Parliament has a long-standing tradition of organizing exhibitions. As of 1994 the Parliament has been making a systematic effort to come closer to the citizens, and mostly the youth, by organizing exhibitions, addressing a wide audience ranging from elementary, junior and senior high school students, members of associations, senior citizen clubs etc., to official delegations visiting the Parliament House, which is the main venue of such events.

Exhibitions are traditionally housed in the majestic "Eleftherios Venizelos Hall", originally the palace trophy room and the aide-de-camp's quarters, named after the prominent Cretan politician and Prime Minister; alternatively, the Peristyle, outside the Plenum Hall, is used as a site.
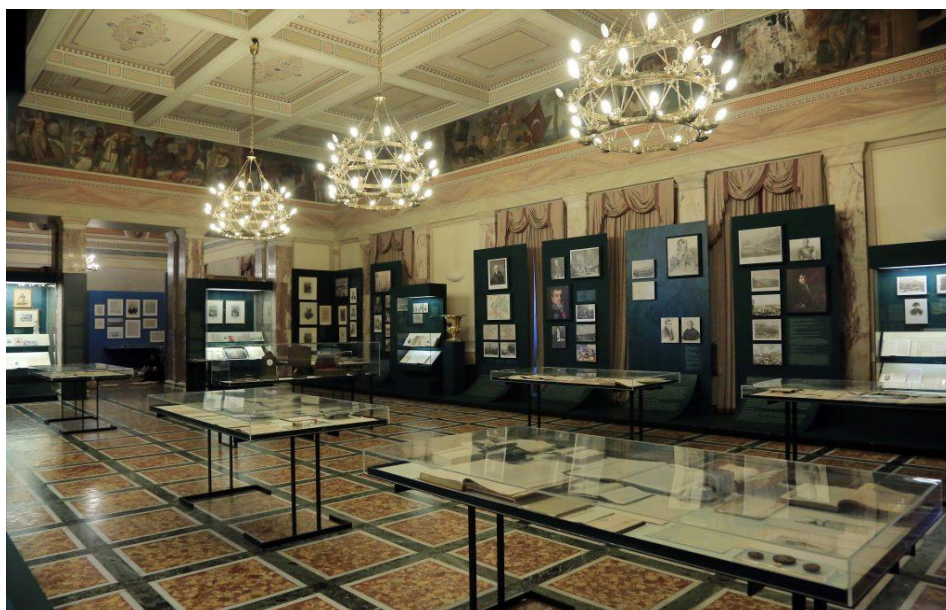
Image 1: The "Eleftherios Venizelos Hall"

The thematic typology of the exhibitions covers a wide range of topics, such as the commemoration of important historical events (e.g. "*The Ionian Islands: 140 years since the Union with Greece*"- 2004, "*Greece in the Balkan Wars: 1912-1913*" - 2003), emblematic political figures (e.g. "*Ioannis Kapodistrias: His progress over time*" - 2016, "*Charilaos Tricoupis: Historical Treasures of Tricoupis family*" - 2012) and institutions (e.g. "*The Building of the Hellenic Parliament*" - 2009, "*30 years since the Constitution of 1975: Greek Constitutions from Rhigas to the present*" - 2004), issues of national and/or international interest (e.g. "*Hellas: Genius Loci*" - 2014, "*Libraries of Hellenism: exhibits from Alexandroupolis and Varna*" - 2004, "*500 years of printed text tradition in Modern Greece (1499-1999)*" - 1999, "*Cartoons from the 27 member-states of the EU*" - 2008) etc.

Despite their different topic, all the exhibitions aspire to create an original narrative, which revisits interesting aspects of cultural heritage. Each narrative is articulated through a variety of multimodal means, like manuscripts, rare books, maps, engravings and drawings, documents, journals, photos and artefacts from the Library's collections and Archives, many of which are unpublished and unseen.

In order to make our exhibitions memorable, explanatory, educational and commemorative material is produced each time (scientific guides, leaflets, CD-Roms, postcards, reproduction of documents, medals, badges etc.).

In the near future, we plan to collect all the insights acquired through almost 30 years of experience and to record them in a step-by-step handbook of *Organizing Exhibitions: Guidelines and best practices,* which will be included in the Library's series *Methods and Tools*.

3. Glossopolis : A case-study

In order to further illustrate the process of constructing an exhibition according to the standards set by the Library of the Hellenic Parliament, we will now focus on a case-study, the multimodal exhibition "*Glossopolis* [City of Language]: Wanderings in Modern Greek", one of the Library's most recent exhibitions.

Glossopolis is a joint venture, a collaboration of the Library of the Hellenic Parliament (Benakeios Library and Political Figures Collections Department) and the Onassis Scholars Association. It opened its gates to the public in February 2016, having attracted 10.277 visitors so far.

3.1.   An overview

Within the series of exhibitions held by the Library of the Hellenic Parliament, Glossopolis holds a special place in at least three different respects:

1) It is the first exhibition about Modern Greek (SMG) as part of intangible cultural heritage - to the best of our knowledge, there is no other similar metalinguistic project.
2) It is a multimodal exhibition, using digital technologies in order to explore language as an inherently immaterial and abstract semiotic system - thus, paving the way of the Library into the digital era (it should be noted at this point that, after Glossopolis completes its lifecycle as an in situ exhibition, it will be uploaded as an e-learning platform, available through the Library's webpage and accessible to all citizens).
3) Glossopolis is not housed in the Parliament's main building on Syntagma Square, as is traditionally the case; rather, it is located at the Former Public Tobacco Factory (218, Lenorman St.), an emblematic industrial building of great historical and architectural value, built between 1928-1930. Glossopolis introduced the building to the close neighbourhood and the wider Western suburban region of Athens.
   Even more, there is a conceptual link between Glossopolis, on one hand, and the Benakeios Library, on the other, since the heart and soul of the latter is the Psycharis Collection (35.000 volumes of books, plus archival material), named after its donor, Ioannis Psycharis/Jean Psychari (1854-1929), a Greek-French linguist, whose pioneer work "*My Journey*" lay the theoretical foundations of the "demotic" (vernacular) variety at the peak of the Greek "language question". Glossopolis develops in the periphery of the library, in order to avoid the stereotypical connotations of the quietness of reading rooms or the heavy atmosphere of book stacks. Still, the implicative presence of the Library lures the visitors, inviting them to peak through the windows or to sneak into the reading room.

The target-group includes pupils and students, language experts and practitioners, families, potentially any citizen with a flair for language.
The main goal of Glossopolis is twofold:
1. following the recent trend towards popularization of science, to render basic principles of linguistic analysis approachable to the general public, providing a descriptive account of basic aspects of Modern Greek linguistic variation and dissolving popular myths about the Greek language – and in that sense it can be categorised as a scientific exhibition.
2. to profile the Library of the Hellenic Parliament as a living, growing organism, that can adapt to change and cater for different needs of versatile audiences.

Image 2: Overview of "Glossopolis"

The concept of Glossopolis relies upon the metaphor of LANGUAGE AS A CITY, quite popular among philosophers, as is illustrated by the following excerpt:

"*Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses.*"

(L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1953)

Why is this metaphor so vivid and functional? Well, come to think of it, for many reasons: cities change over time, so do languages, which are by definition dynamic; cities develop according to an urban plan; languages are structured according to rules and norms. Diversity and heterogeneity are inherent in cities; variation is a distinctive feature of human languages (the analogy goes on and on…).

In this light, Glossopolis stretches along fourteen (14) distinct, but interconnected thematic routes, referring to social, geographical and stylistic varieties of Modern Greek, ranging from standard language and literary style to regional dialects, youth language and anti-languages, Greek as a second/foreign language etc. These linguistic paths aim at representing Modern Greek (and potentially any other language) as an all-encompassing city, in which there is equally spacious room for all speakers and linguistic repertoires.

The multimodal resources that make up this fascinating universe of metalinguistic information, reconciling tradition with innovation, are the following:

- 14 thematic banners, one for each route, including two levels of textual information, one generic and a second one more specialized, framed by 14 artistic compositions, originally created for the needs of the exhibition, visualizing each particular topic,
- 10 digital games-linguistic activities (for details, see 3.2.),
- 2 traditional board games ("trivial pursuit" and "snakes and ladders", consisting of questions relevant to the content of the exhibition),

- video clips and excerpts from movies,
- reference books, e.g. grammars, dictionaries and other metalinguistic tools.

Image 3: The thematic banner for "language loans"

3.2. The digital games: general principles and specific features

Given that the digital games form Glossopolis' innovation, we will elaborate a bit further on the design and implementation process.

The games fall within the rapidly expanding field of Digital Humanities as an interdisciplinary cross-section of Linguistics as a social science with ICT. More specifically:

✓ They adopt the trend for gamification of education (Kapp 2012, Lee & Hammer 2011), instigating motivation and engagement ("edutainment").
✓ They adopt a constructivist and heuristic approach to learning (Errington 2003), in which knowledge is not a prefabricated product, but rather a result of interacting with learning resources ("learning by doing", Aldrich 2008).
✓ There is room for both individual and collaborative learning, since visitors can play in groups of maximum five (5) persons.
✓ In each game there is a) time management, since every linguistic activity has to be completed within a particular time frame, and b) performance self-assessment; however, taking into consideration that the goal is primarily educational, there is no "Game over"; the player(s) can continue through trial and error until they reach the correct answer.

Apart from the general principles, the following strategic choices were made, where game design is concerned, with a view to render the digital activities user-friendly and engaging:

3.2.1. Use of different game formats for each linguistic activity: e.g. in order to illustrate the three different types of language contact, equal in number game formats are employed; *loan translations/calques*[1] are exemplified through a memory card game, *internationalisms*[2] through a "click on the correct word" game and *reborrowings*[3] by means of a "guess the right answer" game.
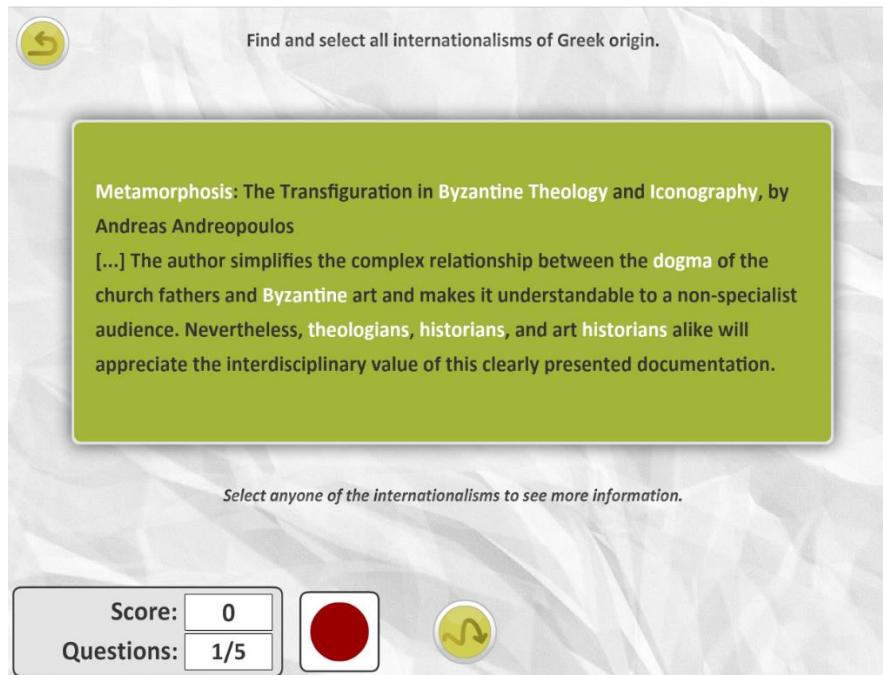

Image 4: The digital game for internationalisms of Greek origin

3.2.2. Clear learning goal: it is of great importance that the learning objectives of each linguistic activity are well-defined. E.g. the hangman (see image 5), in which the user has to fill in the gap with a lexeme of learned origin, aims at introducing learned elements as a register variety[4] of Standard Modern Greek, prototypically used in formal written contexts.

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[1] Loan words which are translated from the source-language by using already existing lexemes of the target-language, e.g. *multimedia → πολυμέσα, internet → διαδίκτυο*.

[2] Words which are translated in more than two languages and form part of an international discourse (e.g. medical or scientific terminology).

[3] Words that travel from one language to another and then back to the originating language in a different form or with a different meaning.

[4] Standard Modern Greek has assimilated the coexistence of two linguistic traditions of different origin: the demotic, spoken by people and formulated through diachronic language change, and the learned variety, fostered by circles of scholars and the Church. Nowadays, after the resolution of the Greek diglossia in 1976, the demotic is the prevalent variety of everyday discourse; learned elements are used as a register variety in written formal text-types.
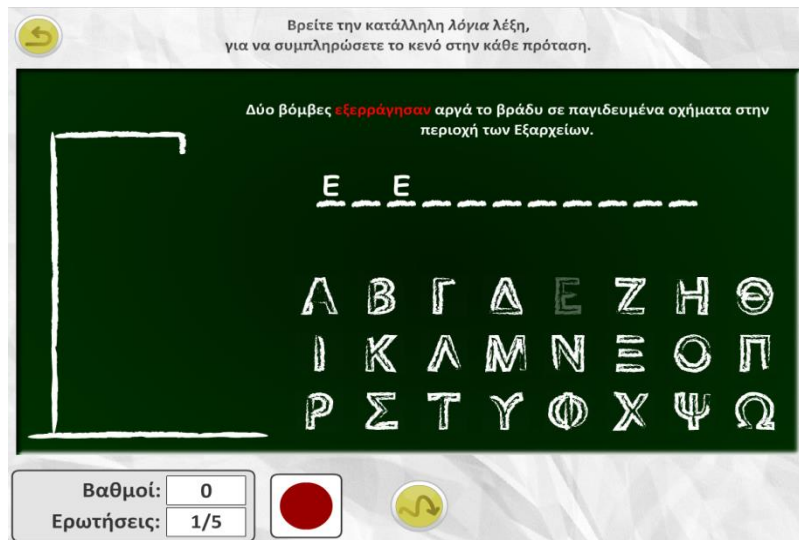
Image 5: Hangman and learned elements as a register variety

3.2.3. Metalinguistic knowledge: on finding the correct answer, each digital game offers simplified metalinguistic information. For example, the activity for reborrowings is followed by a graph, demonstrating the linguistic itinerary of each reborrowing through language contact: in image 6, the Modern Greek word *μπάνιο* 'bathroom' originates in the ancient Greek *βαλανεῖον* 'public bath' (1), which, through the Latin type *balneum* (2), travelled to Italy and was transformed to *bagno* (3); the last stop was back to Greece, this time as the reborrowing *μπάνιο* (4).
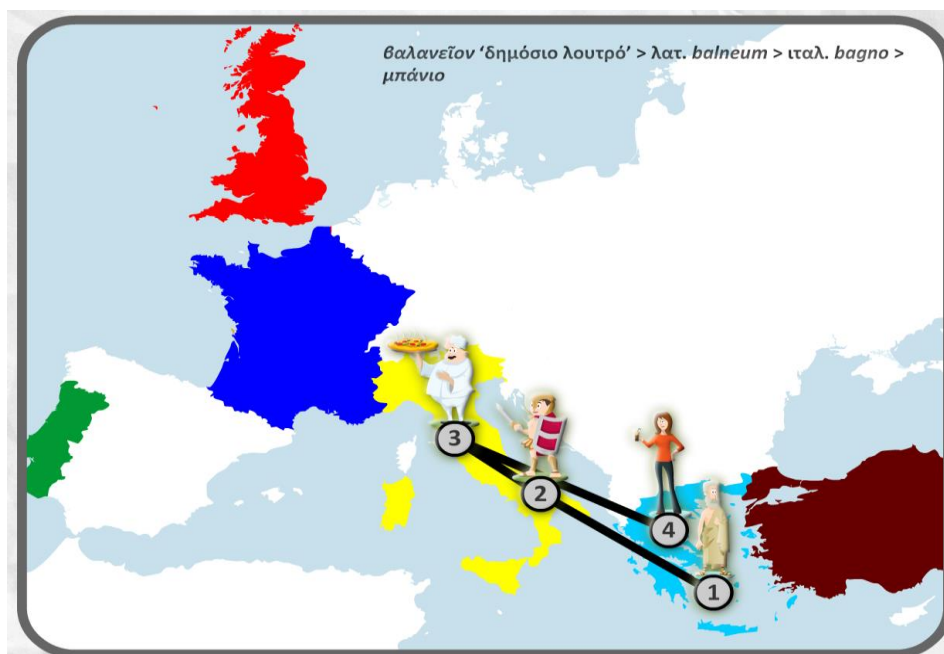

Image 6: The metalinguistic comment on reborrowings

3.2.4. Use of fun and unexpected text-types: in order to engage users, and especially younger ones, fun and unexpected text-types are preferred. For example, jokes help analyse verbal humour as the subversion of the hearer's expectations that is triggered through the

incompatibility between two meanings of the same word, i.e. literal vs figurative (e.g. – Does your friend *work*? – Why, is yours broken?); mural slogans as a subcultural variety of non-dominant discourse are used to approach rhetorical tropes, such as puns, rhymes, metaphor etc., which are recontextualized and detached from their habitual association with literature; finally, words and expressions from youth language are destigmatized and revisited as a creative sociolinguistic variety, vested with covert prestige and in-group solidarity connotations.

Image 7: Mural slogans and youth language as amusing text-types

3.2.5. Combination of digital + conventional resources = added value: in Glossopolis, digital games are not considered as a panacea, but rather as an innovative path to metalinguistic awareness, which can perfectly coexist with more traditional resources. Therefore, in each thematic section, the digital linguistic activity engages into dialogue with other holdings from the Library's collections, co-constructing meaning. For example, in the subsection about Greeklish, an orthographical practice of writing Greek by means of the Latin alphabet used mainly in electronic environments, a digital game of transcribing Greeklish into historical spelling is placed alongside two rare books, exhibiting similar orthographical practices, though occurring in different periods (see image 8): *Latin-Greek* scripture, dating back in the Byzantine era and becoming popular among bilingual speakers of Western origin in the wider area of Smyrna, who were not acquainted with the conventions of historical spelling, and *Karamanlidika*, the practice of transcribing the Turkish language using the Greek alphabet, used by orthodox Turkish speaking inhabitants of Asia Minor who wanted to make an identity statement. The learning goal here is to illustrate that, among the three aforementioned, superficially different cases, the communicative need remains the same: the combination of the language recorded and the writing system selected for recording it is totally conventional, catering for practical and/or symbolic needs of the linguistic community in question.

Image 8: Latin-Greek scripture (*Christianiki Dhidhascalia pros chrisin tis eparchias tis Smirnis*, Library of the Hellenic Parliament, 1873) and Karamanlidika (Library of the Hellenic Parliament, 1866)

3.2.6. Awareness-raising: last but not least, Glossopolis aims at raising awereness as to the ideological implications of language use, focusing on issues of power and control. There is a section on linguistic sexism and gendered stereotypes as the reflection on linguistic behaviour of the unequal distribution of power between the two sexes. Another socially urgent topic under discussion is political correctness and verbal bullying, which functioned as a springboard to further create an experiential linguistic workshop entitled "Words that smile, words that hurt". In this workshop, words about ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, appearance, disability etc. are scrutinized as to their stereotypical connotations and are replaced by others which demonstrate respect and acceptance of the Other.

Image 9: "Words that smile, words that hurt"

Last but certainly not least, a separate thematic route is dedicated to teaching Greek to people with special educational needs (e.g. impaired sight, hearing problems, kinaesthetic disabilities etc.), through accessing the portal http//:prosvasimo.gr («Design and Development of Accessible Educational & Instructional Material for Students with Disabilities"), produced by the Institute for Educational Policy (I.E.P.).
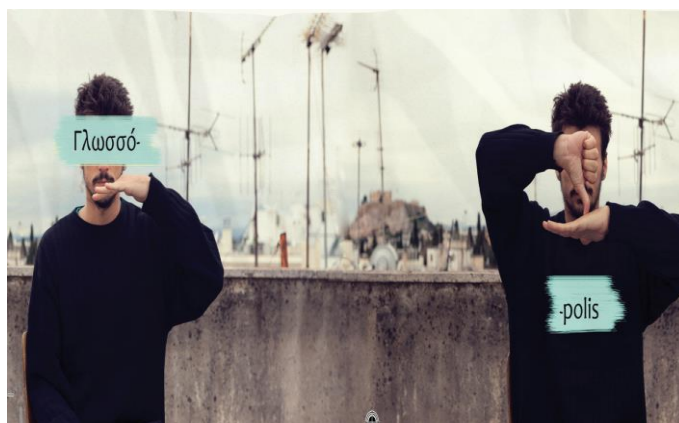
Image 10: "Glossopolis" in the Greek sign language

4. Instead of an epilogue

As is the case with all the exhibitions organized by the Hellenic Parliament, Glossopolis is accompanied by a scientific guide -containing the texts and the visualizations of the fourteen (14) thematic routes, coupled with English translation and indicative references- and postcards, which you can take home with you. We sincerely hope the these souvenirs will function as secret paths that unite our Glossopolis to other inspiring projects in your own native languages!

Thank you for your attention.

Image 11: Postcards as souvenirs

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