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Pharos: Revitalising Community Languages

The Case of Modern Greek

Researcher and Author: Professor Joseph Lo Bianco.

Commissioned by: Modern Greek Teachers' Association of Victoria (MGTAV).

Pharos now shines a light for the MGTAV to further support Greek teaching and learning.

MGTAV Summary

The purpose of this study was to provide a current and factual picture of Modern Greek Education in Victoria, as well as provide directions to focus on in the future to promote, maintain and sustain the Greek language. The research is made up of eight sections, each of them dealing with a different aspect of Modern Greek Education in Victoria.

The first section '**Saved in the Agora: Greek Studies at La Trobe University**', brings to light the recent proposal from La Trobe University to cease its Modern Greek Studies Program, and emphasises the importance of retaining such a precious program. Alongside this, Professor Lo Bianco commends the united effort from the community which resulted in the retention of the program for another three years, and outlines that a similar united approach is required- but on a much larger scale- to revitalise the Modern Greek language in Australia.

In the second section '**Australian Language Problems**', Professor Lo Bianco addresses the serious language problems that Australia faces today as overarching problems that Modern Greek faces. The first of these being generational language loss, or as he coins it, the '3-G problem', where languages other than English are used less and less each generation in Australia. Following on from this, Professor Lo Bianco discusses various fields of study concentrated on 'reversing language shift', and 'language revitalisation', identifying that while school language programs and University teaching are fundamental to the revitalisation process, they alone cannot reverse underlying trends of generational language loss. The second issue he raises, is that of bilingualism in Australia, indicating



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that most high school students across the country are not currently undertaking a language course, and that time devoted to language learning varies for each school. Professor Lo Bianco outlines the need for a coherent and coordinated national vision for languages education that aims to meet all of Australia's communication needs and sets a minimum requirement on time devoted to language learning. Referring also to Australia's 'complacency problem', Professor Lo Bianco explains the effect that the widespread use of English across the world has had on English-speakers in English-speaking countries.

The third section, '**Ecology of Greek in Australia**', provides an ecological perspective of languages learning generally and then specifically for Modern Greek. Throughout this section Professor Lo Bianco expresses that using the language for actual real-world communication and understanding the psychology behind doing so, are fundamental for language learning success. He outlines structures and methods which could inform the development of a strategic community revitalisation plan for Modern Greek. Through expanding on stories and statistics related to migration, the scientific study of language attrition and loss, the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis that resulted in new migration from Greece, and the effects that new Greeks in Greece have had on language, Professor Lo Bianco captures all factors affecting the teaching and learning of Modern Greek in Australia. He also touches on some consistently identified issues, including, but not limited to, declining student enrolment and retention rates, teacher qualifications, and materials and resources.

In the fourth section '**State of Play**', an extended account of the provision of Modern Greek in Victoria over time and across different sectors is provided, indicating an overall downward trend. Beginning with the first establishment of Greek Schools in Victoria, Professor Lo Bianco goes on to provide statistical information, tables, and figures regarding public school enrolments over the years, but also includes facts and figures related to Independent and Private school programs, the Victorian School of Languages (VSL), and Teachers.

The fifth section, '**Discussion and Analysis**', is an extended discussion of the statistical information that has been presented, considering it against selected qualitative research and other informed analyses. This includes looking at sociolinguistic research on Greek in Australia, looking to the diaspora for studies of success and challenges, understanding how political and economic changes have impacted on how Greek Government supports the teaching of its national language abroad, and issues and debates in local Greek media. The final subsection '*Bright Lights*' references and reinforces



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the good will that is present in our community – a community which is committed to the future of the Greek language. Examples of good practice are presented to illuminate the way forward. These include the campaign to save Greek Studies at La Trobe, the money allocated towards Greek kindergarten language programs, as initiated by the Victorian Government, the promotion of Greek Bilingual Programs in 2019, support for teachers of Greek in Victorian government schools and kindergartens, and ongoing support for existing Greek languages programs.

In the sixth section '**A Strategy for Guiding Action**', Professor Lo Bianco explains the language revival approach 'COD' and how it is relevant to revitalising Modern Greek in Australia. He asserts that in order to succeed, Greek teachers, Greek teacher associations and the wider community must: build language capacity in language learners; create and reward opportunities to use the language; and, foster a positive desire to identify with, use and want to improve in the language.

The seventh section '**Ways Forward**', illuminates the path ahead for Modern Greek, where Professor Lo Bianco suggests that despite the challenges and difficulties presented in the research, there are still many positive factors and strong foundations which can be built upon. In his '*Proposals for Action*', he outlines a need for a shared vision amongst all key stakeholders for Modern Greek language. He recommends that a *National Modern Greek Strategic Plan* be produced by the MGTA, in an effort to: have a common understanding of the state of the language; create a set of national principles focused on strengthening the use of Modern Greek in Australia, and, determine a statement of excellence to guide all providers of Modern Greek. He asserts that the process for preparing a *National Modern Greek Strategic Plan* should start with the formation of a Working Party. The '*Proposals for Action*' subsection also includes other recommendations which respond to the current problems that the teaching of Modern Greek faces.

Finally, in his '**Conclusion**', Professor Lo Bianco emphasises that drastic action is required for the revitalisation of Modern Greek in Australia, given that language shift is inevitable. To combat this, he asserts that an explicit, coordinated, community-wide approach will be necessary.



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MGTAV Action Plan

We wish to thank our researcher for the in depth and vital research undertaken which has resulted in **Pharos**. It was an honour for us to have Professor Lo Bianco undertake this research project. We believe **Pharos** represents a watershed and significant period for the direction of Modern Greek in the Antipodes, today and for the future.

The MGTAV has been proactive in its work and some of the recommendations have already been actioned or begun by the current and previous MGTAV committee.

In light of presenting this research, the MGTAV's current goals will be:

- to inform relevant parties of the study's results, conclusions and recommendations;
- to bring a focus to the importance of a cooperative effort from the community for the future health of the language;
- to form a Working Party which will include all key stakeholders of Modern Greek. The Working Party will receive all recommendations made in the research and will pursue for implementation;
- in collaboration with the Working Party, to bring a focus to the importance of a set of national principles for strengthening the use of Modern Greek with other Australian States, leading to the formation of a cohesive National Strategic Plan; and,
- to determine a statement of excellence which will act as a 'lighthouse' to all providers of Modern Greek.