



Immigrant voices in students' essay texts: Between assimilation and pride

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Abstract

The present study concentrates on immigrants' positionings towards the discourse of the majority in Greece. While facing an influx of immigrants during the 1990s, the Greek majority adopted a particularly racist discourse. My purpose here is to explore how immigrant students attending Greek schools attempt to articulate their voice in relation to the assimilationist, racist discourse surrounding them. Focusing on the functions of the disclaimer *I am adjusting myself, but ...* used by immigrant students in a corpus of school essays, we will argue that it constitutes a particularly effective means of allowing them to raise a complex and polyphonic voice pursuing adjustment to the host country, without, however, losing face and pride. More particularly, the data analysis shows that in their school essays, and under the influence of their immigrant/ethnic communities and their negative experiences in the host country, immigrant students recontextualise the majority disclaimer *I'm not a racist, but ...* used by the majority population. The disclaimer seems to have undergone an entextualisation process that has led to the new disclaimer *I am adjusting myself, but ...*, which is intertextually linked with the former, but reversing its target. While the majority disclaimer is an expression of latent racism, the one discussed here involves mitigated threatening acts against majority assumptions as well as the enhancement of immigrant students' face.

Keywords

Assimilationist discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), disclaimers, entextualisation, essay texts, face needs, immigrant students in Greece, intertextuality, recontextualisation, voice

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Introduction

When the influx of immigrants started in Greece at the beginning of the 1990s, the Greek people were faced with a situation with which they were totally unfamiliar and that brought about unexpected and significant changes to the social structure, economy and education. Furthermore, this situation forced them to ideologically position themselves towards newcomers. Although there had already been endogenous minorities in Greece (e.g. the Arvanitika-speaking minority, the Turkish, the Arumanian, the Armenian, the Jewish), all except for the Turkish were assimilated under the influence of the Greek nation-state's ideology of linguistic and cultural homogenisation. As a result, the immigrant influx of the 1990s seems to have unsettled the national balance and considerably disorganised Greek educational practice (Tsokalidou, 2008: 403).

Focusing on education, it should be noted that, at the beginning of the 1990s, Greek schools were totally unprepared to cope with immigrant and local students being together in the same classes. More than 20 years later, immigrant students have eventually surpassed the 10% of the student population in Greek schools. In order to deal with this new reality, recent educational policies, as described in the relevant laws from 1994 until 2011, tend to follow the findings and proposals of contemporary research, in particular the multicultural and integrational models of education (Boutoulousi, 2002). Such policies emphasise, among other things, language teaching in preparatory reception classes by teachers who specialise in teaching Greek as L2 (a second language), as well as exploiting the linguistic and cultural capital of immigrant students in the mixed classes they attend.

Educational practice, however, is significantly different from such theoretical approaches. As Boutoulousi insightfully remarks, 'the laws, e.g. for the benefit of immigrants, will often be more progressive than people's views' (2002: 57) and 'school practice, with the exception of certain programs and the personal effort of specific teachers, [will] essentially remain *monocultural* and *assimilationist*' (2002: 45, emphasis in the original). Such observations bring to the surface the nation-centred, assimilationist and eventually racist character of Greek schools and society (among other European societies), where immigrant students are expected to live and work.

In this study, we will focus on the discursive ways immigrant students position themselves towards the assimilationist, racist discourses surrounding them. While so far immigrant student voices have attracted scholarly attention to a very limited extent (see e.g. Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2009; Papandreou, 2013), here we will analyse school essays written by such students attending Greek Lyceums (aged 15–18 years). In the material examined, we have identified several versions of the disclaimer *I am adjusting myself, but...* Students use this disclaimer first to refer to their adjustment to the new place of residence and to express positive attitudes about that, but, later on, they partly deny or mitigate their initial positioning. This is clearly illustrated in the following examples:¹

- (i) είχα συνηθίσει πλέον την δεύτερη μου πατρίδα (...) παρ' όλ αυτά όμως ποτε δεν ξεχνάω τις δύσκολες μερες που περασα στην αρχή.

I have got used to my second homeland (...) nevertheless I will never forget the difficult days I had at the beginning.

(ii) Όλα μου φαίνονται πιο οικεία με τον καιρό. Ποτε όμως δεν θα πάψει να μου λείπει ο κόσμος μου.

Everything seems to me more familiar as time goes by. But I will never stop missing my world.

In what follows, we will first present the theoretical framework of the study, drawing mainly on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Special emphasis will be placed on the interrelation between the macro level and the micro level. The first involves the assimilationist, monolingual and monocultural environment of Greek society, which young immigrants appear to be forced to accept. The second refers to how immigrant students position themselves towards the surrounding macro level in their texts. In this context, we will analyse the function of different versions of the disclaimer *I am adjusting myself, but . . .*. The theoretical discussion will also exploit concepts such as *intertextuality*, *entextualisation* and *voice*. The central question of our analysis revolves around the issue of how immigrant students employ this disclaimer to express a complex, polyphonic voice in the context of assimilationist views and values that prevail in Greek society. Their voice and positionings will be accounted for using the concept of *positive face*.

Theoretical background of the study: Critical Discourse Analysis, intertextuality, entextualisation and voice

The main goal of CDA is to unveil the discursive ways social inequality is reproduced and to denaturalise such reproduction (see, among others, Fairclough, 1989; Van Dijk, 2008; Wodak and Meyer, 2001). Moreover, CDA explores ways of positioning towards this naturalised reproduction of social inequality via discourse (Blommaert, 2005). One of its most important principles concentrates on the relation between the macro level, involving the dominant (social, linguistic, educational, etc.) values and views, and the micro level, involving the discursive strategies and texts produced by individuals (Van Dijk, 2008: 85–89).

In this article, we intend to analyse how immigrant students discursively position themselves towards the assimilationist, racist discourse surrounding them. Thus, in Blommaert's terms (2005: 99), we will attempt to 'situat[e] individual agency in a wider frame of constraints'. Interestingly, the expressions analysed here, being of the type *I am adjusting myself, but . . .*, exhibit intertextual links with the *I'm not a racist, but . . .* disclaimer (*δεν είμαι ρατσιστής, αλλά...*), mostly used by majority speakers (Van Dijk, 1992). Following Fairclough (1992: 84), *intertextuality* is 'the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in'. The same author also discusses the formation of *intertextual chains* between texts, where one of them is transformed into another in a systematic and easy to trace manner (Fairclough, 1992: 130–131). As we will argue, if majority expressions target immigrants in a covert manner, the expressions identified in our data could be considered immigrants' discursive responses targeting majority speakers in a covert manner, thus forming an intertextual chain. In this sense, immigrant students seem to activate and evoke the first disclaimer, which is common in majority discourse, by reversing its directionality.

A closer examination of the disclaimer in question will reveal the particular *entextualisation* process the disclaimer has undergone. According to Blommaert (2005: 47):

[e]ntextualisation refers to the process by means of which discourses are successively or simultaneously decontextualised and metadiscursively recontextualised, so that they become a new discourse associated to a new context.

On the basis of the above remarks, the following analysis will show that the former disclaimer is dissociated from its original function and, being entextualised in a new context, has acquired a new function, that is the mitigated targeting of the local majority, along with the enhancement of immigrant students' face that has been threatened in the first part of the disclaimer. The students' face reinforcement is made possible by reference to their experiences and wishes. In this way, and following Blommaert's remarks (2005: 68), we will argue that the disclaimer in question constitutes a very efficient means for 'generat[ing] an uptake of [students'] words as close as possible to [their] desired contextualisation', that is for the creation of 'favourable conditions' for the articulation of their own *voice*.

The discourse of monoculturalism, monolingualism and xenophobic homogenisation

In this section, we will discuss the macro level, which, as already mentioned, involves the dominant (social, linguistic, educational, etc.) values and views, that is, the dominant discourses via which social reality is represented and organised (Fairclough, 2003). More specifically, we will refer to the homogenising discourse prevailing in western countries (Van Dijk, 2008: 72), including Greece.

It is perhaps a truism to say that, in the West, multiculturalism and multilingualism are conceived as problems rather than as resources which could enrich and enhance communication among people (see, among others, Dendrinos, 2001). The quest for national unity and the avoidance of diversity emerge as core values in western civilization. The cornerstone of western nation-states is the dominance of a *single* national culture and a *single* national language (see, among others, Macedo et al., 2010: 138, 143, 146). This is achieved through various institutions and mostly through (language) education (Blommaert and Verschueren, 1998: 103–104). Very often, however, within the borders of a single state different languages and cultural groups coexist. Paying particular attention to the Greek case, we could observe that, although 'Greece has perhaps been the most entrenched nation-state of the Balkans' due to its 'domination/exclusion language policy' (Greenberg, 2010: 382), nowadays there are numerous minority and immigrant groups whose members speak different languages (e.g. Albanian, Turkish, Roma, Bulgarian, Romanian, Slavic) and who are often deprecated because they do not conform to the ideal of cultural and linguistic homogeneity (Christidis, 2001: 265).

This strong emphasis on the presupposition of monolingualism and monoculturalism for the construction and sustainability of the nation-states became even more intense after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. The ensuing

geopolitical changes and the subsequent movement of millions of people from their homelands have recently led to an explosion of nationalism and the empowerment of extreme right-wing political parties in the western world. Such parties argue, among other things, against globalisation, the establishment of common institutions (e.g. within the European Union) and the presence of immigrant populations in their countries (see e.g. Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2009: 571–572). They draw on a new racist and xenophobic discourse that centres around the negative presentation of foreign out-groups and the positive presentation of national in-groups (see e.g. Augoustinos and Every, 2007; Every and Augoustinos, 2007; Van der Valk, 2003; Van Dijk, 1993, 2005; see also Wodak and Richardson, 2013).

Language education seems to promote such a xenophobic and homogenising discourse, though in a more covert manner, having a strong, eliminating influence on ‘threatening’ minority languages and cultures (cf. Blommaert and Verschueren, 1998: 103–104). In Greece, children coming from minority and immigrant communities are exposed exclusively to the Greek-speaking curriculum *as if* Greek were their mother tongue, while their own linguistic and cultural background remains unexploited in their education (Kiliari, 2005). In other words, these students are (in)directly instructed by the dominant national and educational discourse to adjust themselves by learning the Greek language, embracing the Greek culture and abandoning their own linguocultural traits. Immigrant students are expected to perform in the school environment exactly as native speakers of Greek do. If they fail to do so and drop out of school, they will inevitably be marginalised. This seems to be the outcome, on the one hand, of the insufficient laws which are restricted only to a ‘progressive cover-up’ without specific commitment to the rights of immigrant students (Boutoulousi, 2002: 56) and, on the other hand, of inappropriate teaching practices followed by untrained and non-specialist teachers in classes that host both immigrant and local students. In addition, it has been suggested that some teachers have more or less conscious xenophobic attitudes (Gkantartzi and Tsokalidou, 2011).

The strict boundaries between majority and immigrant populations in Greece are also illustrated in recurrent incidents, usually involving Albanian immigrants who constitute the biggest immigrant population. In the first half of the 2000s on several occasions, school students of Albanian descent were not allowed to carry the Greek flag in school celebrations.² Also, the extremist slogan *Δεν θα γίνεις Έλληνας ποτέ, Αλβανέ, Αλβανέ* (‘You’ll never become Greek, you Albanian, you Albanian’) was introduced and became popular in 2004, after a football match between the national teams of Albania and Greece, where the latter, albeit being the European Champion for that year, lost the game. Furthermore, despite their fluent knowledge of Greek, first-generation Albanian immigrants have remained blue-collar workers and they have been expected by the majority to feel grateful for that. Similarly, second-generation Albanian immigrants may have a university education and the potential for social mobility, but they are still perceived as second-class citizens by members of the majority. All these cases clearly show the strict ethnic boundaries that separate Greeks and Albanians (or other immigrant populations), thus excluding the latter from becoming equal, legitimate members of Greek society and depriving them of their ensuing rights (cf. Liakos, 2005: 101).

Given the above, we could suggest that the assimilationist discourse addressed to the immigrant population could be formulated as follows: immigrants coming to Greece are expected to learn Greek as if it were their mother tongue, to accept the Greek culture and to leave their own linguistic and cultural characteristics behind. They are also expected to be grateful for the low-prestige social roles and professions assigned to them. All this is presented as the 'best' that Greek society can offer and it is *not* perceived by Greeks as indicative of racist practices and views. Such majority expectations become a significant part of the context where immigrants work and live, as well as of the generalised (and stereotyped) *collective face* of the majority as perceived by them (cf. Sifianou and Bayraktaroğlu, 2012).

If immigrants in Greece do not align with such assimilationist expectations, they quite often have to pay the heavy price of exclusion. Even more, during the last 20 years or so, in Greece (as in the rest of Europe) racist groups and parties have appeared, the most prominent among them being the Golden Dawn,³ exhibiting extremely violent behaviour against immigrant people. Such racist groups draw both on assumptions about the purity and superiority of the Greek race and on extreme national ideas, that can be labelled 'new racism' (Barker, 1981), recognising the Greek culture as the 'cradle of the global civilization' (see Papandreou, 2013: 172–175). Under the strong influence of such assimilationist practices and views, and also under the fear of being identified by racist groups, most adult immigrants make great efforts to abandon their distinctive features and become 'invisible'. Immigrants' compliance with assimilationist pressures has led adult Albanians living in Greece, for instance, to come up with 'survival strategies' such as making their names look and sound like Greek ones, participating in Orthodox Christian holidays and learning Greek very quickly (Gogonas, 2010: 75, 78, 91, 101–102, 157).

In light of the above remarks, it is very interesting to investigate the way young immigrants position themselves towards the dominant assimilationist and homogenising discourse that prevails in Greek society in general (even if not all Greek citizens agree with it). To this end, a significant contribution comes from the meticulous ethnographic research conducted by Papandreou (2013) during the period of 2004–2005, on the attitudes and identities of immigrant Lyceum students in the centre of Athens. He maintains that these students seem to position themselves in a complex manner, since most of them follow their own individual itineraries, being in a more stable and secure position than their parents were due to family support and their parents' urge to integrate. More particularly, they go beyond traditional borderlines, adopting broader identities that include bonding both to the homeland and to the host country (cf. Papandreou, 2013: 210, 216, 440; see also Papataxiarchis, 2006: 61ff, 69ff). Papandreou (2013: 217–218, 441–442) also identifies a few cases of immigrant students who insist on stressing their loyalty to their ethnic group without, however, belonging to a subculture juxtaposed to the majority population.

Following this line of research, our analysis aims to investigate the role of the disclaimer *I am adjusting myself, but...* in the production of immigrant students' voice.⁴ We will argue that this disclaimer is a very efficient discursive means that gives immigrant students the opportunity to express their need for adjustment to the host country, without

losing their self-esteem and without challenging the homogenising expectations of the majority population in a provocative way.

The study data and the data collection process

In the framework of the research project *Education for Foreign and Repatriated Students*, under the auspices of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the research team of the University of Patras⁵ visited approximately 50 schools (including primary schools, high schools and Lyceums) in Attica and the Peloponnese, and handed over questionnaires investigating immigrant students' attitudes towards both their heritage languages and the Greek language.

Students were also asked to take the position of an immigrant friend of theirs and write a letter about things that trouble them and things that please them in their new place of residence. Our expectation was that our immigrant students would draw on their own experiences or on those of their relatives, which did happen in most cases. At this point, we should note that the teacher's role was, to a considerable extent, performed by the researcher, after both the teacher and the school director gave their permission. This, however, did not lead to any changes in the typical procedure of essay writing in class or in the essays' form.

In an effort to account for the context of the production of such letters, it should be noted that teachers have the right and the obligation to ask students to produce texts by specifying their topic and structure. Afterwards, teachers collect the essays to read and mark them, suggesting corrections. They also evaluate them according to the widely accepted linguistic and educational standards, as specified in teachers' manuals. Students wishing to get a good grade are expected to (more or less consciously) comply with such standards, including, among other things, social attitudes concerning immigrants.

In the present study, we concentrate on the essays collected from the Lyceums, in particular on 118 essays collected from eight Lyceums situated in different parts of the Peloponnese. Their authors were bilingual speakers, mostly of Albanian origin, but also of Russian, Bulgarian, Polish, Moldavian, Ukrainian, etc. origin.

The present discussion will focus on 12 essays (10.1%) where the disclaimer *I am adjusting myself, but...* appears. Although the disclaimer surfaces in a limited number of essays, we would like to point out that its complex function as a face-threatening and face-enhancing device, addressing both the local majority and the immigrant students themselves, is particularly important and interesting. Its limited appearance in this set of data could be considered indicative of the fact that the essay-writing process does not seem to be the appropriate locus for immigrant students' attempts to articulate a complex voice diverging from the expected full compliance with the educational and social normative discourse of the majority. However, the fact that some of these students dared, after all, to articulate their voice in such an educational context deserves our attention. The following section concerns the qualitative analysis of the data, where we move from the macro level to the micro level, as we concentrate on students' texts and positionings.

Classification and analysis of the data

The aim of the analysis is to help us to understand the function of the disclaimer representing immigrant students' complex and polyphonic voice. The analysis is mainly qualitative and not quantitative, as it does not take into consideration social factors, such as immigrant students' place of origin, gender, age, fluency in Greek, time of stay in Greece, their parents' occupation, etc. Such an approach would presuppose a different research design, hence it goes beyond the limits of the present study.

As already mentioned, we intend to explore and compare the role and functions of two similar disclaimers with different targets, namely *I'm not a racist, but...* (targeting immigrants) and *I am adjusting myself, but...* (targeting the majority). Between the two disclaimers, there is a *manifest intertextual link* since both of them 'overtly draw on' the same oppositional schema (see Fairclough, 1992: 84). In the *I'm not a racist, but...* disclaimer, the initial positive self-presentation of the majority speakers is followed by a negative other-presentation of immigrants introduced with *but* (e.g. *but they break into our houses*) (Van Dijk, 1992). The same could be said of the disclaimer in the essays examined here. Contrastive markers such as *βέβαια* ('of course'), *αλλά* ('but'), *εκτός από* ('except for'), *ωστόσο* ('however'), *όμως* ('but'), *παρόλο που* ('even though'), *παρ' όλα αυτά* ('nevertheless'), *αν και* ('although') introduce the second part, where, in spite of majority expectations, immigrants refuse to assimilate and accept majority values (cf. Politis and Archakis, 2000). More specifically, in the second part, immigrant students (a) refer to their experiences and memories as victims of racist attitudes and attacks (see examples of group A, following) and (b) refer to the fact that they miss friends and relatives in their country of origin (as in group B, later). Such views could be perceived as more or less threatening by majority recipients, especially by those who embrace assimilationist and xenophobic views. They can also be seen as enhancing those students' face that has been threatened in the first part of the disclaimer. In the following analysis, we will concentrate on the threatening and enhancing potential of the second part of such disclaimers in relation to the consent expressed in the first part in both types of examples.

The face threat and the face enhancement included in such a disclaimer can be described in politeness theory terms, as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). According to this theory, individuals wishing to show or build solidarity bonds with members of a (dominant) group resort to *positive politeness strategies* which, among other things, evoke shared values, common ground and mutual appreciation between group members, and also show speakers' acceptance of common traits, wishes, aspirations, etc. (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 70, 103, 124; see also Sifianou, 1992: 42). On the other hand, when such strategies are not used or when speakers (directly or indirectly) comment negatively on the group and its members, mutual appreciation, namely positive face, is threatened or damaged (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 66 ff.).

Remembering and experiencing racist behaviour in the new place of residence⁶ (group A)

1. Μετα από ένα χρόνο περίπου **ειχα συνηθισει πλεον την δευτερη μου πατριδα** ειχα βρει και πολλους φιλους. Ηξερα να γραφω να διαβαζω και να μιλω απιαστα τα Ελληνικα όλα

πλεον μου φαινοντουσαν παρα πολυ ευκολα παρ' ολ αυτα όμως ποτε δεν ξεχναω τις δυσκολες μερες που περασα στην αρχή. Αυτή τη στιγμή **μου αρεσει παρα πολυ η Ελλάδα** εχω παρα πολλους φίλους που τους αγαπω πολυ στο σχολειο δεν με αντιμετωπιζουν ρατσιστικα (*αν και μερικες φορες ναι*) και γι' αυτό ειμαι παρα πολυ χαρουμενη. [κορίτσι αλβανικής καταγωγής]

After a year or so **I had at last got used to my second homeland** [i.e. Greece]. I had also made many friends. I knew how to write, to read and to speak Greek fluently, everything seemed very easy after all, *nevertheless I will never forget the difficult days I had at the beginning*. Right now **I like Greece very much**. I have many friends whom I really love, I am not treated in a racist manner at school (*although sometimes I am*) and that's why I am really happy. [girl of Albanian origin]

2. Την επόμενη χρονία **τα πράγματα πήγαιναν καλύτερα** και άρχισαν να με κάνουν παρέα οι συμμαθητές μου και οι φίλοι μου. *Αφού όμως έμαθαν πως είχα ψυχολογικά προβλήματα την προηγούμενη χρονιά*. [κορίτσι молδαβικής καταγωγής]

The following year **things went better** and my schoolmates and my friends started to hang out with me. *But [this happened] after they found out that I was having psychological problems during the previous year*. [girl of Moldavian origin]

3. [Ε]ίμαι αποφασισμένη να μείνω σ' αυτή την χώρα, να σπουδάσω κ' να ζήσω για πάντα, γιατί *παρόλο που οι βασικές μου αναμνήσεις είναι πικρές, η Ελλάδα είναι μια χώρα που μου δίνει ευκαιρία κ' αληθινά την αγαπάω πολυ*. Μάλιστα έχω αποφασίσει να κάνω το γύρο της Ελλάδας. [κορίτσι βουλγαρικής καταγωγής]

[I] am determined to stay in this country, to study and to live here forever, because *even though my main memories are bitter, Greece is a country that gives me an opportunity and honestly I really love it*. In fact I have decided to travel all around Greece. [girl of Bulgarian origin]

4. **Τώρα πια μιλάω πολυ καλά την γλώσσα και δεν αντιμετωπιζω το πρόβλημα της ασυννηοσίας. Έχω πολλους φίλους από εκεί που δεν είχα κανέναν. Τώρα κανέναν δεν μπορεί να καταλάβει ότι είμαι αλλοδαπή διότι δεν διαφέρω σε τίποτα από αυτούς**. [κορίτσι ουκρανικής καταγωγής]

Now I speak the [Greek] language very well and I don't face communication problems. I have many friends even though at the beginning I had none. *Now nobody can tell that I am a foreigner because I am no different than they are*. [girl of Ukrainian origin]

In extracts 1–4, in the first part of the disclaimer, immigrant students express their positive attitudes and adjustment to the majority context in various ways:

ex. 1(i) **I had at last got used to my second homeland [i.e. Greece]**

ex. 1(ii) **I like Greece very much**

ex. 2 **things went better**

ex. 3 **Greece is a country that gives me an opportunity and honestly I really love it**

- ex. 4 **Now I speak the [Greek] language very well and I don't face communication problems. I have many friends even though at the beginning I had none. Now nobody can tell that I am a foreigner because I am no different than they are.**

Via such expressions, immigrant students adopt the majority perspective and present themselves in a positive manner: they appear to gradually accept the conditions and values of their new place of residence, whereby they develop bonds with members of the majority. In this sense, the first part of the disclaimer could be considered as a politeness strategy enhancing the immigrants' positive face, as they fulfil the expectations of the majority. However, this positive self-representation also has a threatening effect, since it is achieved via their full alignment with the majority assimilationist discourse. The immigrant communities' expectations, according to which immigrant students should keep and display strong bonds with their homeland and assign a prominent position to it, seem to be ignored in the first part of the disclaimer.

Later on, however, the initial acceptance and consent are mitigated and partly revoked by expressions threatening the collective positive face of the majority:

- ex. 1(i) *nevertheless I will never forget the difficult days I had at the beginning*
 ex. 1(ii) *(although sometimes I am [treated in a racist manner])*
 ex. 2 *after they found out that I was having psychological problems during the previous year*
 ex. 3 *even though my main memories are bitter*
 ex. 4 *Now nobody can tell that I am a foreigner because I am no different than they are*

Such utterances reveal immigrant students' negative experiences with members of the majority: adjustment difficulties, racist behaviour, psychological problems due to their schoolmates' rejection, denigration by the majority. In general, the negative experiences attested to in the second part of examples 1–4 result from, or are directly related to, social exclusion, in spite of the fact that immigrant students express their 'love' for their 'second homeland', that is, Greece. This is illustrated in example 2, where the student reports that she started enjoying her schoolmates' company only when the latter found out about her psychological problems which were caused by their rejection of her in the past. In example 4, the student also clearly implies that she felt excluded by her majority schoolmates. In example 1, the disclaimer is used twice to denounce the racist behaviour of the majority, despite the writer's positive framing and conclusion (*that's why I am very happy*). The second part of example 3 also has a threatening content as it hints at the majority's racist behaviour. However, it seems to lose its emphatic function since it precedes the positive one that underlines the student's adjustment.

In example 4, the contrast between the first and second parts is implied rather than clearly stated. A close examination of the sentence, *Now nobody can tell that I am a foreigner because I am no different than they are*, reveals that, contrary to what happens now, in the past this student was perceived by majority members as a foreigner who was 'different' from 'them'. In general, the pronouns *they/them* are used to refer to members of the outgroup, namely those excluded from *we/us*. Although the student

states that she no longer differs from majority students, she uses the pronoun *they* to highlight the clear distinction still prevailing between her immigrant group (*we/us*) and the majority (*they/them*).

The analysis has so far shown that, in the examples belonging to group A, the disclaimer consists of a first part referring to a graded adjustment to the new place of residence, and of a second part including a threat. The overall effect of the whole utterance could be a mitigated threat towards the majority. By evoking unpleasant memories due to racist attitudes, immigrant students present majority members in a negative manner. On the other hand, immigrants' recollections of their negative experiences in the host country and their explicit references to them endow immigrant students with a sense of cultural pride that enhances their positive face.

Such observations allow us to better understand the entextualisation process of the disclaimer in question, that is how the disclaimer *I'm not a racist but...*, used by majority people, is 'recontextualised' and becomes 'a new discourse' (Blommaert, 2005: 47), namely the disclaimer *I am adjusting myself, but...* used by immigrant students. Here, it is crucial to realise that, while the disclaimer of the majority constitutes a covert attack on immigrants, the disclaimer of the immigrants does not only attempt a mitigated counterattack on majority people, but simultaneously enhances the face of those immigrant students who use it. As shown in examples 1–4 and elsewhere in the extracts, immigrant students underline their satisfaction in getting used to the new environment of the host country and express their determination to stay (e.g. *I am really happy* [example 1], *I am determined to stay in this country, to study and to live here forever* [example 3]). However, immigrant students attempt to counterbalance the compromise of their cultural heritage and the ensuing loss of face (due to their declared loyalty to their new homeland) by keeping their memories of hard times alive. By referring to their unpleasant experiences in the second part of the disclaimer, on the one hand, they threaten the collective positive face of the majority by undermining their xenophobic assumptions and, on the other, they enhance their own face by attributing pride to themselves. To sum up, the entextualisation process of the original disclaimer, that is its exploitation in a new context by immigrant students, leads to a new version which reverses the target and covertly threatens the majority, while reinforcing the positive face of the immigrant students.

Missing friends and relatives and feeling homesick (group B)

5. **Στη συνέχεια προσαρμόστικα** και τα πράγματα ήταν εντελώς διαφορετικά. Έκανα φίλους με το σχολείο τα πήγαινα παρα πολύ καλά και ετσι δεν εχω και πολύ πρόβλημα. *Βέβαια μου λείπουν πάρα πολύ οι συγγενείς μου και οι φίλοι μου αλλά τι να κάνω ετσι είναι η ζωή.* [κορίτσι αλβανικής καταγωγής]

Later on I adjusted myself and things were totally different. I made friends, I did really well at school and so I don't have that much of a problem. *Of course I miss my relatives very much and my friends* but what can I do, that's life. [girl of Albanian origin]

6. Οι γονείς μου δουλεύουν και παίρνουν και πολύ καλό μισθό. **Η ζωή μας εδώ είναι πολύ καλή.** *Αλλά μου λείπει η πατρίδα μου και οι συγγενείς μου πολύ.* [κορίτσι αλβανικής καταγωγής]

My parents work and their salary is very good. **Our life here is very good.** *But I really miss my homeland and my relatives.* [girl of Albanian origin]

7. **Γενικότερα δεν είχα κάποιο ιδιέταιρο πρόβλημα** εκτός από το το θέμα του ρατσισμού και ότι μου λείπουν τα ξαδέρφια μου γιατί αφου μενω εδώ τώρα και πηγαίω μόνο 1 φορά το χρόνο για 20 μερες το πολύ και μου είναι δύσκολο γιατί χανω πολλά πράγματα και υπάρχουν και μερικά ξαδερφια μου που δεν τα ξερω καν και αν τους δω στο δρομο δεν θα τους γνωρίσω και είναι κρίμα. [κορίτσι αλβανικής καταγωγής]

In general I didn't have any particular problem except for the racism issue⁷ and the fact that I miss my cousins because now that I live here I only visit [them] once a year for 20 days at most and it is hard for me because I am missing many things and there are some cousins of mine I haven't even met and if I see them on the street I won't recognise them and it's a pity. [girl of Albanian origin]

8. Μπορεί ολο αυτό να φέρεται περίεργο αλλά **σιγά σιγά το συνηθίζω και μου αρέσει.** Είναι ωραίο να γνωρίζεις άλλους πολιτισμούς με διαφορετικά ήθη και έθιμα συνήθειες κ.λ.π. *Ωστόσο η νοσταλγία για την πατρίδα πάντα υπάρχει!* [αγόρι αλβανικής (?) καταγωγής]

It might sound strange but **I gradually got used to it [i.e. the new place] and I like it.** It's good to get to know different cultures with different manners and customs, habits, etc. *However, nostalgia for the homeland always remains!* [boy of Albanian (?) origin]

9. Η πρώτες μερες για μενα ηταν πραγματικά δύσκολες αλλά **συγα συγα συνηθησα.** Το σχολειο σχετικα ειναι καλύτερα και μου αρεσι δε λεω αλλά θα προτιμουσα να ειμουν εκεί μαζί σου. [κορίτσι αλβανικής καταγωγής]

For me the first few days were really difficult but **gradually I got used [to the new place].** School is relatively better and I like it, I admit, *but I would rather be there with you.* [girl of Albanian origin]

10. **Όλα μου φαίνονται πιο οικεία με τον καιρό.** Ποτε όμως δεν θα πάμει να μου λείπει ο κόσμος μου... *Ο κόσμος μου είναι εκεί... Ένα μέρος μου είναι εκεί...* [κορίτσι αλβανικής (?) καταγωγής]

Everything seems to me more familiar as time goes by. *But I will never stop missing my world... My world is there... A part of me is there....* [girl of Albanian (?) origin]

In examples 5–10, we can identify the following positive attitudes and adjustment to the majority context:

- ex. 5 **Later on I adjusted myself**
 ex. 6 **Our life here is very good**
 ex. 7 **In general I didn't have any particular problem**
 ex. 8 **I gradually got used to it [i.e. the new place] and I like it**

- ex. 9 **gradually I got used [to the new place]**
 ex. 10 **Everything seems to me more familiar as time goes by**

Such expressions (cf. examples 1–4) allow immigrant students to present themselves in a positive manner. They therefore constitute an effort to create bonds with the majority. By embracing majority values, immigrant students attempt to strengthen the solidarity bonds between the two groups, and hence to enhance their own positive face. However, from an ingroup immigrant perspective, this alignment with majority assumptions makes them damage face, as we have also pointed out in the analysis of examples 1–4.

Moving on to the second part of the disclaimers, such views are compromised:

- ex. 5 *Of course I miss my relatives very much and my friends*
 ex. 6 *But I really miss my homeland and my relatives*
 ex. 7 *except for (...) the fact that I miss my cousins (...)*
 ex. 8 *However, nostalgia for the homeland always remains*
 ex. 9 *but I would rather be there with you*
 ex. 10 *But I will never stop missing my world... My world is there... A part of me is there...*

The contrast identified in the preceding extracts stems from the immigrant students' need to connect with family and friends in their countries of origin. Immigrant students show that, despite their efforts to adjust, there is an empty space in their lives that can only be filled by friends and relatives 'from home', not by new friends and relations in the host country. By admitting their (strong) wish to maintain bonds with people from their homeland and, if possible, to get back there sometime, their initial statement of adjustment is compromised and immigrant students clearly distinguish themselves from the majority. Consequently, they reveal both their partial acceptance of majority values and their partial integration into the host community. In this sense, they perform threatening acts towards the collective positive face of the majority, in particular of those who embrace assimilationist values, since not *here*, in Greece, but *there*, namely in their countries of origin, are their relatives, their friends, their world, the homeland (see example 10). Such acts in the second part of the disclaimer are graded in threatening potential: the threat is minimal when they only say that they miss their friends and relatives (examples 5–7),⁸ it becomes stronger when they appear to be homesick (example 8) and it culminates when *there* is used (examples 9–10), via which immigrant students make a mental move from the 'hard', inhospitable and (to a certain degree) rejected *here*, namely their present place of residence, to the 'familiar' *there* of the homeland.

What is more, by presenting themselves as homesick and by wishing to return *there*, immigrant students highlight the positive influence and significance of their own cultural background and context. Therefore, such utterances in the second part of the disclaimer perform self-determination acts that also attribute to immigrant students a sense of cultural pride which enhances their positive face (see also the analysis of examples 1–4).

Rounding up the discussion of group B examples, the disclaimer includes a first part showing the students' acceptance of the new context and their gradual adjustment to it, and a second part of graded threat. The overall effect of such disclaimers, in accordance

with that identified in the examples in group A, could be summarised as a mitigated threat to the collective face of the majority. However, compared to the examples in group A, the examples in group B appear to be less threatening, as majority members cannot be held exclusively or directly responsible for immigrants' preference for their compatriots and homeland.⁹ Thus, in the examples in group B, the entextualisation process of the former disclaimer leads to a new disclaimer which mainly highlights the students' intense need to maintain a bond with their homeland. In this way, immigrant students gain self-esteem and pride which reinforce their positive face.

Discussion

While investigating the disclaimer *I am adjusting myself, but...*, we could not help but notice its intertextual relation to *I am not a racist, but...*, which has been extensively discussed by Van Dijk in a series of studies on racism (1992, 1993, 2005, 2008, among others). Van Dijk has investigated the negative attitudes conveyed in the representation of immigrants' (or other minorities') behaviour in everyday and media contexts. Such majority statements represent immigrants' behaviour as something 'unnatural' and 'abnormal', as a problem or even a threat to the majority, who thus complain and 'counterattack' immigrants or other minorities (Van Dijk, 1987: 40, 42–43; see also Blommaert and Verschueren, 1998: 15). However, as Van Dijk (1992: 89–97, 2008: 122–124) observes, in the western world, due to the prevailing humanitarian, anti-racist values promoting tolerance and solidarity for the 'Other', racist attacks are often mitigated and expressed through disclaimers, for example *I am not a racist, but..., we have nothing against black people, but..., some of them are smart, but...* (Van Dijk, 2008: 109). Such disclaimers encode the majority's positive, tolerant attitudes towards immigrants and other minorities, while at the same time they denounce specific 'deviant' immigrant behaviours and project them as a widespread phenomenon (e.g. *they are dirty, they cause trouble, they steal, they abuse the elderly/women/children, they kill*; cf. Van Dijk, 2008: 130).

In the present analysis, it has been argued that the disclaimers identified in our corpus exhibit manifest intertextual links with those analysed by Van Dijk and could be considered part of the same intertextual chain. More specifically, the disclaimers examined here share specific features: they contain a first part via which immigrant students attempt to construct a positive self-image by embracing the dominant values in Greek society. Thus, they use expressions such as *προσαρμόζομαι* ('I am adjusting myself'), *συνηθίζω* ('I am getting used to'), *μου αρέσει* ('I like'). Then, a second part follows which encodes the racist attitude immigrant students are faced with in Greece (group A examples), as well as the nostalgia they feel for their homeland (group B examples).

The analysis has elaborated on this intertextual link, attesting to a certain entextualisation process that gives a more polyphonic function to the disclaimers in question. The disclaimers found in this data do not only aim to counterattack the collective face of the majority by reversing the target of the original disclaimer, but they also aim to counterbalance those face needs that have been compromised because of students' declared loyalty to the host country. In other words, immigrant students attempt to show that, despite the assimilation process described in the first part, they have not fully accepted the

majority culture and way of thinking. Thus, in the second part they explicitly refer to the negative experiences they have had due to the xenophobic behaviour that prevails in Greek society, as well as to nostalgia for their homeland and to the bonds they wish to maintain with their friends and relatives there. Such references may threaten the collective face of the majority, but they simultaneously build immigrant students' sense of cultural pride, enhancing their positive face. By bringing into the spotlight their own memories and wishes, for example by highlighting their 'positive images of their own culture' (see Clark and Ivanič, 1997: 47), immigrant students articulate, and guide the uptake of, their own voice. And this voice does not only express their (wish for) adjustment, but also their hope that this adjustment will be achieved by maintaining a part of their cultural background and not by totally rejecting it.

Such immigrant voices are compatible with findings from Papandreou's (2013) research which was conducted in central Athens on a similar student population. Papandreou observes that most immigrant students indeed want to adjust to their new environment following their own personal itineraries and to keep a bond with their homeland which they can only afford to visit a couple of times a year. Thus, they construct a broad sense of identity which includes both the ex- and the new (or second) homeland (Papandreou, 2013: 196–197, 210, 216, 440; see also Papataxiarchis, 2006: 61ff, 69ff). A student-informant of Papandreou's study very aptly suggests the following: *Να είσαι Αλβανός στην καρδιά και να ζεις στην Ελλάδα* ('Be an Albanian at heart while living in Greece') (Papandreou, 2013: 209). Moreover, according to the same study, there are immigrant students, mainly of Albanian origin, who – albeit adapted to the Greek environment – stress their strong loyalty to their ancestral homeland, due to unpleasant experiences at the hands of the Greek majority. Such experiences have led them to keep a strict boundary between their own ethnic group and the majority population (cf. Papandreou, 2013: 217–218). As Papandreou (2013: 442) aptly points out for this group of immigrant students: '[t]he need for a strong "ethnic" defense against assimilation suggests that [these students] recognised the process of cultural integration as a threat of "cultural shrinking"'.

In this context, the disclaimer in question appears to be a particularly efficient means for immigrant students to express their polyphonic voice, in other words their wish to adjust to the Greek environment without causing conflicts and juxtapositions (see Papandreou, 2013: 218, 442), and at the same time to achieve that on their own terms – such terms involving the right to keep their memories and nostalgia alive.

Concluding remarks

The central question of this study pertains to the way immigrant students in Greece discursively position themselves towards the assimilationist, racist discourse surrounding them. The data analysis has shown that in their school essays, and under the influence of their immigrant/ethnic communities and their negative experiences in the host country, immigrant students recontextualise the original disclaimer *I'm not a racist, but...* used by the majority population. The disclaimer seems to have undergone an entextualisation process that has led to the new disclaimer *I am adjusting myself, but...*, which is intertextually linked with the former, but reversing its target. While majority disclaimers are

expressions of latent racism, the ones discussed here involve mitigated threatening acts against the majority assumptions as well as the enhancement of immigrant students' face.

An important parameter of the present analysis involves the interaction between the macro level, here the wider assimilationist context in Greece, and the micro level, here immigrant students' disclaimers in their essays shaped by their living memories. In the first part of such disclaimers, students evoke the dominant, assimilationist majority views with which they seem to comply at first. Then, in the second part, they project their immigrant views of self-determination which mitigate or challenge the initial compliance. This combination of first and second parts constructs immigrant students' voice which, while striving for adjustment to the host country, clearly states their own terms, thus building their pride. Such terms involve their right to keep alive their memories of their ancestral homeland and of their (early) suffering in the host country. Maintaining memories via the disclaimer could be seen as a particularly efficient strategy for immigrant students to keep a bond with their past (i.e. their homeland and the experience of immigration) and to resist full assimilation without, however, precluding adjustment to the host country. Thus, they seem to go beyond the traditional borderline between their immigrant/ethnic community and the majority population by adopting a broader identity that includes references both to their homeland and to the host country. In light of the above, I would like to suggest that such disclaimers constitute complex political acts of positioning by immigrant students living in Greece at the beginning of the 21st century.

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Notes

1. All the examples were translated into English by the author. The Greek extracts from students' essays maintain the original, sometimes unconventional spellings. These spellings were not, however, reproduced in the English translations.
2. On Greek national holidays, student parades usually take place, where the best student from each school is head of the parade and carries the Greek flag.
3. Nowadays, Golden Dawn is the third political party in terms of number of votes in Greece. In September 2013, members of this party – including its leaders – were arrested and accused of assassinating immigrants and also a 32-year-old Greek musician.
4. For a systematic exploration of immigrant voices in contemporary Greek fiction, see Gotsi (2012).
5. The research team at the University of Patras participated in sub-action 5.1 of the project, entitled *Exploration of the need to support repatriated and foreign students' heritage languages*.

6. In the following examples, the first part of the disclaimer appears in bold and the second part in italics. At the end of each example, information is provided concerning the informant's gender and country of origin based on what students report about the language they speak at home. The question mark indicates that, even though immigrant students have stated that they use Greek at home, this is partly or not at all accurate, since the information collected by the researchers reveals that at home they (also) use their heritage language (e.g. Albanian).
7. Example 7 is actually a mixed case (the only one in our sample) as its second part includes both an emotional outburst (as all the examples in group B) and a memory of a racist experience (as all the examples in group A).
8. In example 5 in particular, the student moves back and forth: she begins by stating her adjustment, proceeds with her reservations and then returns to the initial acceptance (*but what can I do, that's life*).
9. In any case, the exact degree of threat can only be measured by taking into consideration the actual addressee(s)' reactions to such disclaimers in real-life situations. This could be achieved by analysing either conversational data (using analytical tools from conversation analysis or the ethnography of communication) or language attitudes. This is therefore an aim to be pursued in future studies.

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