Symbolic Value and Greek Foreign Language Learner Investment in Multilingualism

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Linguistics

by

Elpida Petraki

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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By

Elpida Petraki
Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Linguistics
University of California, Los Angeles, 2019
Professor Susan J. Plann, Chair

Since Greece entered the EU, language learning has become prominent and gained further momentum in the context of modern globalized economy. Acknowledging the intense commodification of the modern foreign language education industry, this research explores Greek Foreign Language Learner (FLL) investment in multiple foreign languages, and how symbolic value can influence it. To this purpose, I borrow the definition of symbolic value from the field of sociology—namely the context-dependent sociocultural meanings associated with commodities, or in the context of this research, languages—and, grounded on the construct of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015), which is located at the intersection of identity, ideology, and capital, I perform a thematic analysis of thirty-three semi-structured, in-depth, interviews conducted with Greek FLLs. The results lead to the following conclusions: i) knowledge of English is so widespread it is taken for granted; investment in several foreign languages is thought essential for professional success and signifies personal cultivation and social class
aspirations. ii) Proficiency, but mainly certification, in languages of major EU countries is thought to be necessary for career purposes, and has come to represent symbolic power, which is associated with desirable linguistic capital and learner identity, but not necessarily with economic advantages. iii) Recent economic developments drive learners to consider alternative language choices that are associated with negative symbolic value but are understood to grant access to the “new economic world order.” However, despite their increasing economic relevance domestically and internationally, these languages cannot “stand alone” in terms of the individual’s capital. Learning languages associated with positive symbolic value appears crucial in terms of identity as it allows learners to affiliate with desired imagined communities and to claim imagined futures, thereby forging modern national and transnational identities that transcend the limitations posed by current political and economic events in Greece.
The dissertation of Elpida Petraki is approved.

Marjorie Harness Goodwin

Paul V. Kroskrity

John H. Schumann

Susan J. Plann, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2019
DEDICATION PAGE

To my poor red eyes
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VITA

2007  B.A., English Language and Literature, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece.

2009  M.A., American Studies, Specialization in Literature, University of Nottingham, UK.

2010  M.A., Applied Linguistics and English Language Teaching, University of Nottingham, UK.

2010-2013  Freelance Foreign Language Tutor, Greece. Candidate preparation for English and Spanish, A1-C2 CEFR.

2012-2013  Oral Examiner and Proctor, Test of Interactive English.


2013-2018  Teaching Assistant/Associate/Fellow, University of California, Los Angeles.


2018-2019  Dissertation Year Fellowship, Graduate Division, University of California, Los Angeles.

2019  UCLA Certificate in Writing Pedagogy, University of California, Los Angeles.
PRESENTATIONS


CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Topic Introduction: Investment and Symbolic value

Greece is what Kloss (1966) would describe as a “monopaidoglosic” country; one
language, Greek, has official standing and is used in all walks of life. Like all countries in its
close vicinity, Greece has a long tradition in multilingualism; however, the face of the modern
Greek state is monolingual and is deliberately promoted as such. Nevertheless, after the
introduction of the country in the European Communities (which later became the European
Union), multilingualism in English and major languages of the European Union (EU) was
introduced early in public primary school through foreign language teaching. Despite the
officially monolingual status of the country, multilingualism in major EU languages was, and
still is, viewed as an asset, and is encouraged by both the government and societal norms.
Foreign language learning through paid language services in Greece is a must -so much so that it
has jokingly been characterized as a “national pastime” for Greeks who attend private Foreign
Language Institutes (FLIs) en masse. According to a 2010 study, 92% of Greek children learned
at least one foreign language, while 66.7% of adults learned one or more foreign languages
(Nikolopoulos & Kouzeli, 2010). More recently, according to Eurostat data published for the
European day of Languages in 2018, 95% of Greek students at the lower secondary level learn
two or more foreign languages (Eurostat, 2016).

As a longtime Foreign Language Learner (FLL) and a new foreign language teacher, I
was fascinated by the ubiquity of foreign language learning in Greece and the extent to which it
is embedded in Greek consciousness, culture and education. In the past decades pursuing multilingualism in several foreign languages from a young age became the norm for a large number of Greeks, even for those who did not have an immediate practical use for that knowledge both as children and adults. Therefore, I wished to comprehend what individuals in an officially monolingual nation, who do not plan to migrate or study abroad, perceive as the benefits of multilingualism beyond English in terms of their identity and social and professional lives. The process of language learning is a costly one in terms of resources required to become proficient in each foreign language and acquire certification in it, as is almost always the case for Greek FLLs who decide to pursue languages. Therefore, I wanted to examine the reasons why learners were (and are) so deeply committed to the process of becoming multilinguals in more than one foreign language; in other words, I wished to investigate Greek FLL investment (Pierce, 1995; Norton, 2000, 2013; Darvin & Norton, 2015, 2016) in multilingualism.

The intense commodification of language learning in the burgeoning private Greek foreign language education (FLE) industry was another phenomenon that drew my attention, as it appeared to shape learner attitudes towards languages and the process of language learning. The commodification of language in Greece might stem from the great emphasis that is placed on language certificates, but it is intensified by the promotion of languages, like other branded commodities, on the basis of their symbolic value, each representing a specific set of qualities and characteristics and each marketed as being more suitable for specific purposes and consumer groups (learners). Like brands, languages are promoted as having fixed qualities and benefits that can be transferred to the learner through language acquisition. Thus, in the context of the globalized economy and the commodified nature of modern FLE, where emphasis is increasingly placed on the “objectified form” of language knowledge, namely the language certificate,
symbolic value emerges as a factor that could influence language learning, just as it influences the consumption of more traditional commodities (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 50). In the same way that symbolic value of a particular brand of car can influence consumer choice through the connotations it carries in terms of prestige, status and identity, the symbolic value of foreign languages can influence learner investment, namely their commitment to language learning and specific language(s) in terms of the perceived benefits for their capital, and, consequently, their identity.

This research focuses on the point at which symbolic value and FLL investment intersect. It looks at Greek FLL investment in multiple languages within a monolingual nation, the reasons it takes place, and how it allows learners to imagine their futures and (re)construct identities, while examining the ways this investment is influenced by the perceived symbolic value of foreign languages within the commodified FLE context in Greece.

1.2 Foreign Language Learning in Greece

Foreign language learning in Greece is introduced during the first years of public primary school, continues until the first years of post-secondary education, and resumes at the university level. Students take up to two foreign languages in school. The most commonly taught are English, French and German, while Spanish and Italian have also been added as options for high school students. Regarding the reasoning behind these language choices available in public education, Dendrinos (2007) explains that “the fact that only a few widely used languages are offered in schools … is not a result of policy but of commonsensical ad hoc decisions made by
Ministers of Education” (p. 86). However, widespread disappointment with the public educational system drives most Greek students to private FLIs for their specialized language learning needs, even though foreign language teaching in public schools is free (Katsampeki, 2014). Foreign language teaching in public schools follows the Greek Ministry of Education curriculum. In contrast, private FLIs provide a variety of foreign language options learners can choose from, and language instruction is almost exclusively oriented towards language certificates essential for professional and academic purposes.

The certificates that provide official recognition of language skills are in accordance with the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR), or other internationally acknowledged educational criteria. There are three level groups determined by the CEFR, and each level is comprised of two sublevels: Level A (Basic user) includes A1 (Beginner) and A2 (Elementary), Level B (Independent User) includes B1 (Intermediate) and B2 (Upper Intermediate), and finally level C (Proficient User), which includes C1 (Advanced) and C2 (Proficiency) (Council of Europe, 2017). Language certificates are so popular in Greece that in 2009 the annual expenditures for certification exams was fifteen million euros (seventeen million dollars)¹ (Davanellos, 2016). For a fee, which varies according to language and level of difficulty, students sit for exams for each corresponding level to obtain a certificate. In Greece, certificates corresponding to Levels B and higher are most commonly required for employment purposes. The certificate that affirms the knowledge of the foreign language and objectifies the individual’s cultural capital “in the form of academic qualifications” is often considered the natural “finishing point” of the language learning process (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 50).

¹ 1,13 EUR to USD exchange rate.
This trend towards more foreign language learning, which has been prominent since 1981, namely when Greece joined the EU, has nourished what Prodromou (1988) calls “an enormous and thriving private sector” (p. 81). From late August to late September, that is, at the beginning of every academic year, a multitude of private FLIs offer service packets that promise easy and efficient language acquisition and target learners of all ages, including young children (Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2013). In Greece, the notion of the private FLIs or that of foreign language tutoring is extremely popular, well institutionalized, and goes back to 1920 (Tsakiris, 2014). Even in 1988, just 7 years after Greece joined the EU, a survey indicated that the aggregate expenditure of households on educational activities outside the public system was half of what the state was spending on education, and the dominant type of expenditure was for foreign languages (Kanellopoulos, 1988). More recently, a 2017-2018 report based on household expenditure data from 2015 indicated that Greeks spent 621,164,425 euros ($698,055,263) on private FLE (GSEE Center of Educational Policy Development, 2018). During the 2015-2016 academic year it was reported that one million students attended private FLIs (Davanellos, 2016).

The great appeal of targeted foreign language learning in Greece is due to several factors. First, certified mastery of at least one of the major European languages (almost exclusively English) is a prerequisite in virtually every employment position in Greece. As far as the public sector is concerned, as Dendrinos (2007) points out, “job applicants for public services are awarded significant credit points for their certified competence in […] languages” (p. 90). Also, there is the prospect of employment in multinational companies, where knowledge of languages can open professional opportunities. Moreover, tourism has always been one of the major Greek national resources and the main employer for a large number of individuals. Foreign language
knowledge is a prerequisite for the tourism industry. According to Prodromou (1988), since 1984, when Greece became a full member of the European Economic Community (which was absorbed by the wider EU framework in 2009), there has been increased integration with Western industry and commerce, which has also contributed to the creation of a sophisticated Greek tourist industry and created the demand for more language learning. Another reason why Greeks are drawn to language learning is due to their migratory tendencies during the 20th and 21st centuries. For example, since 2010 more than 300,000 Greeks have migrated all over the world, but mainly to Germany, the UK and Australia, which has led to an increase in the demand for foreign language learning in Greece (Smith, 2015). The migrants include a large number of Greek students who continue their studies (university or postgraduate) outside Greece, and individuals who seek employment.

As Giannakidis (2010) points out, Greece has the highest number of private FLIs in Europe (6,564), with one private foreign language center for every 2,000 Greeks. In 2019, the official page of the Greek Ministry of Economy and Growth-General Secretariat of Trade and Consumer Protection (http://app.gge.gov.gr/) cited the tuition from 5,223 registered private FLIs. Of course, this number does not take into account the multitude of instructors who offer foreign language tutoring services at their own or their students’ house. The high number of private FLIs and foreign language tutors corresponds to the increased demand in foreign language

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2 More often than not, these foreign language instructors remain invisible from the official census of the foreign language teaching force. This is because they offer their services “under the table” in order to avoid the harsh taxation inflicted on every kind of freelancing professional activities in Greece. According to the site “Forologikanea.gr” (taxation news), the amount that has to be paid monthly to the Insurance Organization of Freelance Professionals often surpasses the amount gained from teaching. Another reason that could deter freelance language tutors from being visible in the official census is that they might already hold a teaching position in the public sector, which makes it illegal for them to teach outside the public sector for extra monetary gains. These kinds of educational activities (which are not regulated by the state and often not reported or taxed) are called “παραπαιδεία” (parapedia), meaning parallel to “official” education (Kanellopoulos & Psacharopoulos, 1997).
learning that has been the norm in Greece, especially during the past three decades, and is indicative of the attitudes towards the effectiveness of foreign language instruction in private FLIs (Ismailidou, 2010). The Eurobarometer 2012 report indicated that Greece stands out as the European country with the strongest perceptions that out of school classes are the most effective way to learn a language (NS Opinion & Social, 2012). Finally, in terms of language choice, according to a 2012 survey for private FLE in Greece, the majority of Greek FLLs (448,822) chose to learn English, while German came in second with 27,976 students, and French, Italian and Spanish followed with 21,136, 6,745, and 4,223 students respectively (Nikolopoulos & Kouzeli, 2010).

According to a survey conducted in 2012 based on a sample of 514 parents whose children attended private FLIs in Athens, foreign language instruction could cost from 700 euros ($790) to 4,000 euros ($4,500) per year (Research Institute University of Macedonia, Final Report, 2012, p. 120). The amounts reported did not include expenses for books and other supplies. Prices often depend on the prestige of the FLI, the difficulty of the language level, and the number of students in each group. Home tutoring, or intensive foreign language courses at the advanced levels, are usually the most expensive type of private foreign language classes. Learners study each foreign language for a median of six years, which is usually the time required to obtain their first certificate (usually the upper intermediate B2 as defined by the CEFR) (Katsampeki 2014). Adding up the costs of their yearly tuition per language during these six years, which increases according to the level of sophistication for each language course, it is evident that choosing the “right” language in which to invest resources is an important decision.

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3 After the financial breakdown and capital controls imposed on Greece since summer 2015 the amounts indicated in this paper were subject to change. A new study breaking down private FLE fees has not yet been released (May, 2019).
Thus, it is clear that foreign language learning in Greece is viewed as an important investment in terms of time and money.

1.3 Aims of the Study

This study aims to explore the sociocultural aspects of FLE by investigating Greek FLL investment in multilingualism, and how this investment is influenced by symbolic value associated with foreign languages within the context of modern commodified FLE. More specifically, the aims of this research are the following:

i) Examine the symbolic value associated with different foreign language choices and the language attitudes and ideologies that comprise it.

ii) Examine how the perceived symbolic value associated with each foreign language affects language choice and shapes learner identities, influencing FLL investment.

To analyze how learners perceive the symbolic value of different foreign language choices available in Greek private FLE, I explore what qualities they associate with each language. To accomplish this, much like in marketing research, I explore “brand image,” or for the purposes of this project, “language image;” namely, the language attitudes and ideologies that convey what kind of emotional, social or cultural associations learners make with each language, and how valuable they consider the language to be compared to other foreign languages (Driesener & Romaniuk, 2006). Furthermore, to study how the symbolic value of languages can affect the construction of learners’ linguistic capital, I examine the importance of the symbolic value of
languages in relation to other factors that might motivate learners to acquire languages, such as their communicative or “communication value” (Q) (Swaan, 2001). Finally, to examine the role of symbolic value in identity creation in foreign language learning, I explore how the acquisition of foreign languages, even if learners never use or have any practical need for them, allows them to appropriate qualities represented by their symbolic value in order to form, or transform their identity and index preferences or identification with specific qualities and groups.

1.4 Significance of Study

This project contributes to the study of FLL investment by engaging with multilingualism (in addition to English) in the EU. There is a wealth of literature on the importance of English for socioeconomic advancement in the modern globalized economy, inside and outside the EU, and on how learners believe it is an essential tool that will grant them access to modernity (Bolton, 2006; Kubota, 2011; Oikonomidis, 2003; Park, 2011; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). Although there is theoretical discussion on how English will eventually lose its high value due to over-abundance of the skill in the market (Grin, 2001; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002), few empirical studies examine whether learners feel the same, and if so, how they construct their linguistic capital to be competitive in the globalized economy. Additionally, there might be a plethora of studies investigating learner investment in English (Norton & Kamal, 2003; Norton, Jones & Ahimbisibwe, 2011; Mohammadian & Norton, 2017), but the same is not true for learner investment in other languages, in addition to English. Even though there are reports by the European Commission (TNS Opinion & Social, 2012; De Sousa Lobo Borges de Araujo et al.,
suggestions a correlation between multilingualism and economic benefits, few empirical studies investigate how learners take advantage of multilingualism, in addition to English, to achieve imagined futures and claim membership in imagined communities, thereby claiming multiple identities.

This research also contributes to the study of FLL investment in the context of modern commodified FLE by examining how investment can be influenced by symbolic value. As Cameron (2012) explains, languages can function emblematically: “their meaning does not depend on being able to decode the words but only on recognizing the language they belong to and making the relevant associations” and can be commodified in terms of their symbolic value (p. 356). For example, Pennycook notes (2007) that “when we talk of English today we mean many things […] English is not so much a language as a discursive field: English is neoliberalism, English is globalization, English is human capital” (p. 112). And even though Cameron (2012) maintains that the symbolic value of languages plays a prominent role mainly within promotional genres like advertising, I argue here that perceptions of the symbolic value of foreign languages are also deeply ingrained in national narratives, within FLLs and the discourse of FLE industry and play an important role in foreign language learning. These perceptions can be as important as beliefs about language in terms of its communicative and economic utility and will eventually influence learner investment.

Symbolic value in relation to consumption and its importance in identity formation has been extensively discussed in the fields of marketing, social science, consumer behavior research and anthropology of consumption. Since language has been intensively commodified in the era of globalization and capitalism and can be theorized as a commodity (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986, 1991; Heller, 2010) in the context of modern FLE, I argue that theoretical approaches used to
analyze commodities and their role in the social lives of the consumers can also be applied to
languages and their roles in the social lives of the learners who “consume” them. Therefore, this
project borrows the analytical concepts of “symbolic value,” and, by extension, “symbolic
consumption” from these disciplines to provide an additional perspective into foreign language
learning behaviors in the modern highly commodified context of FLE for the field of Applied
Linguistics.

Furthermore, although much has been written about the symbolic dimension of languages
which reflects relationships of power (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991), and how “language choice
in the European Union is related to power” (Loos, 2000, p. 44), there are few empirical studies
that actually indicate how this symbolic dimension and the power relationships it entails are
perceived and experienced by learners who invest time and money in foreign languages for
professional, academic and personal reasons. This empirical study aims to shed light on how
power plays out in terms of language choice and learner identity, since as Guilherme (2002)
points out, learning foreign languages “implies taking an ideological view of the world beyond
our cultural borders which reflects the way we perceive ourselves within our own culture and its
position towards the Other” (p. 154). Even though currently multilingualism gains more
acceptance and is viewed as essential, hegemonic discourses seem to preserve long existing
linguistic hierarchies. By problematizing capital, identity and ideology, while engaging with the
concepts of imagined futures, communities and identities (Darvin & Norton, 2016), this
motivational construct allows us to examine how perceptions of Greek FLLs’ own linguistic
capital, in relation to perceptions of power relationships between nations and languages in the
EU and internationally, can shape their investment in multilingualism.
Studies on investment (Gao et al., 2008, Gu, 2008) increasingly call for examination of learner connection to language learning with a focus on the changing economic, sociocultural and political context of modern nation-states. This empirical study can add to the discussion by providing insight into how the social and cultural meanings (symbolic value) associated with foreign languages in a specific national context can practically affect FLL relationship to language learning and shape FLE discourses. Furthermore, although the symbolic value or “brand image” of foreign languages in Greece—even though it is shaped by wider social, political, economic and historic events—is specific to Greek FLLs and the Greek FLE context, it can provide insight into the commodification of language in the context of modern FLE and the different forces that can influence and shape FLL investment in other countries and regions as well. This in turn can provide more information about the nature of language learning in the era of globalization, where language learning is increasingly associated with profit. FLE in Greece and particularly private FLE, with its intense focus on the commodification of language in terms of certificates and specialized learning for specific purposes, offers fertile ground to study how the symbolic value of languages can influence FLL commitment to different language choices.

1.5 Overview of Chapters

In the “Theoretical Framework” that follows in Chapter 2, I discuss modern FLE and the nature of motivation in the era of globalization, as well as how in this context languages came to be viewed and treated as commodities that carry exchange value. This is a prerequisite to my examination of the role of the symbolic value of languages in FLL investment in Greece. The
chapter also contains a “Literature Review” section, where I discuss the main theoretical concepts I use for the analysis of my data: I employ the construct of investment to discuss how symbolic value can affect motivation and language choice and influence learner identity, while I borrow the notions of symbolic value and symbolic consumption from the field of sociology to look into how consumers (in this case learners) perceive the symbolic value associated with each foreign language choice and use it to index identity, status and group membership.

In Chapter 3, on “Methodology,” I explain the procedures according to which I collected and analyzed my data. I discuss the research questions for this project and procedures for data collection and analysis. Additionally, I explain the criteria for participant selection, and I provide the language and certification profile of the participants.

In the chapters that follow, “Greek Foreign Language Learner Investment in Multilingualism” (Chapter 4), “Positive Symbolic Value and Greek Foreign Language Learner Investment” (Chapter 5) and “Negative Symbolic Value and Greek Foreign Language Learner Investment” (Chapter 6), I present my results based on my qualitative data analysis. In Chapter 4 I begin with the thematic analysis of my data to explore FLL investment in and beyond English. In the final “Discussion” section of this chapter I deliberate on my findings in terms of my theoretical framework as a segue to delving into investment in multilingualism in the context of modern commodified FLE and how it is influenced by symbolic value. My analysis in Chapters 5 and 6 is realized in three steps: the first two sections of these chapters are dedicated to the thematic analysis of the data, where I first explore attitudes and ideologies that make up the symbolic value associated with different foreign language choices, and then I examine themes that indicate how this symbolic value interacts with the three pillars of investment: capital, identity and ideology. In Chapter 5 this happens in relation to positive symbolic value and in
Chapter 6 in relation to negative symbolic value. In “Discussion,” the final section of Chapters 5 and 6, I elaborate on my findings in terms of my theoretical framework and relevant literature.

Finally, in “Conclusions and Limitations” (Chapter 7) I provide an effective final analysis and point out limitations of this project. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of this study in terms of acquiring a new perspective to examine learner investment and multilingualism in the ever-changing context of capitalism and the globalized economy.
CHAPTER 2
Theoretical Framework

2.1 Foreign Language Learning in the Era of Globalization

The effects of globalization on language learning have been widely discussed in terms of the commodification of language (see Heller, 2003, 2010, 2011; Bruthiaux, 2008). There are several definitions of globalization. Blommaert (2010), for instance, notes that the term describes the intensification of the circulation of capital, commodities, people, images and discourses around the globe. This is caused and facilitated by the recent technological innovations in the field of media, information and communication technology and results in “new patterns of global activity, community organization and culture” (p. 296). As Cameron (2012) explains, the most important aspects of the phenomenon that influence language learning are the following:

1. “Increased transnational mobility and migration (along with changes in the conditions of their occurrence).

2. The growth of global communications via new digital media (the internet, satellite TV, etc.);

3. The emergence of what has been called ‘the new capitalism’—a way of organizing flows of capital, along with the material processes of production and distribution, made possible by a combination of economic/financial deregulation and the availability of new information and communication technologies;
4. The ‘marketization’ of culture and discourse—a tendency for the values, logic, and language of capitalism and/or business to be applied in domains that were previously seen to lie at least partly outside their remit” (p. 352).

According to Heller (2010), there are specific features of the globalized new economy that result in the increasingly central economic role for language. First, linguistic resources increasingly substitute other types of resources that were responsible for the circulation of goods in the past. For instance, linguistic and communicative competence is more relevant in the contemporary global labor market compared to physical strength. Additionally, in many sectors language is both the means through which work is accomplished and the product of that work. The service sector is mainly communicative-based, and increasingly globalized networks require communication to be regulated “across linguistic difference,” thereby making linguistic skills more desirable and valuable (Heller, 2010, p. 104). Also, a great part of the work process is computerized nowadays, augmenting the value of language and literacy skills of workers. Finally, linguistic resources are often used symbolically to “add value to standardized products” in the global market (Heller, 2010, p. 104). In this way, as Heller (2010) explains, language is not so much a “reflection of the social order but is part of what makes it happen” (p. 102).

Since globalization has made modern nation-states more “porous,” monolingual nations pursue multilingualism to be able to compete in the new economic order (Gerhards, 2012). Although in the past countries focused on constructing and promoting monolingual nation states, now there is a movement towards multilingualism, either to move across national boundaries more easily, or to be able to participate and compete in global markets (Extra & Gorter 2008, Francheschini 2009). Therefore, linguistically, as Rubdy & Tan (2008) explain, there appears to be a movement towards a postmodern age where multilingualism is the norm. Multilingual
competence can enable individuals to pursue an array of possibilities in the globalized economy. In Europe for example, knowledge of foreign languages in combination with the right of free movement, which allows individuals to “seek work, settle, or to provide services in every EU member state,” can offer more educational and professional opportunities (Gerhards, 2012). Hence, there is a tendency to pursue languages that have the potential to yield the highest economic benefits by providing access to international commerce and the globalized economy (Heller, 2003).

As Gerhards (2012) points out, “language and language competence can be understood as a resource, or as capital” (p. 28), and learners may choose to learn languages for their communicative or economic value in order to enrich their linguistic capital and reap the benefits in terms of cultural capital (skills and educational qualifications) and economic capital (material wealth) (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991). However, although indications of the economic benefits of multilingualism within the EU are strong, it is not clear what the parameters should be for knowledge of one, or several foreign languages, to wield economic and/or social benefits. It has been indicated that demand for language knowledge is often globally used for gatekeeping and not because it is necessary for job positions (Bolton 2006; Park 2011), and even advanced proficiency in highly sought-after languages with inherent linguistic capital (like English) may not secure economic or social advantages for the learner if they are not granted the right to speak and be heard in the target language (Norton 2017). Nevertheless, although multilingualism does not automatically guarantee socioeconomic benefits for the learner, motivation to learn several foreign languages is high and attitudes towards multilingualism appear positive in Europe (De Sousa Lobo Borges de Araujo et al., 2015), even in officially monolingual European nation states like Greece.
Therefore, in the context of the modern globalized economy, languages (both domestic and foreign) are increasingly seen both as a source of profit and as a means to maximize profit. Duchêne & Heller (2012) also indicate that in the context of capitalism language is treated less like a source of pride, as it was the case in the context of older nationalist ideologies, and more like a source of profit. This is due to the influence of neoliberal ideology on modern economies, which dictates that the main goal of national language policies should be to “maximize economic advantage in a hypercompetitive new world order” (Cameron, 2012, p. 353). As Block (2013) explains, neoliberal ideologies are represented in what is now the “commonsense” framing of language education across different nations, characterized by presumed ideals of upward individual economic mobility and global economic competition. Block (2013) notes that there is a shift in educational philosophy that resulted in the orientation of pedagogy towards market values, individualist and competitive business models, and away from social and cooperative ethics. In this way, Heller (2011) argues that language teaching in modern nation states is increasingly seen as a means to prepare “little entrepreneurs for the global marketplace” which legitimizes neo-liberal regimes of regulation and normalizes decisions about what languages should be taught, when, how and to whom, even though these decisions should come under scrutiny and not be considered as normative (p. 352). Therefore, language learning is increasingly motivated by economic rationalism and languages are treated as tradable commodities with an exchange value.
2.2 Commodification of Language and Symbolic Value

Since language has gained prominence and value in modern markets, as Heller (2010) explains, it “has become a commodity itself, and therefore, acts as a resource to be produced, controlled, distributed, valued and constrained” (p. 108). The commodification of language refers to the phenomenon of viewing and treating language as a tradable commodity that has an economic exchange value (Cameron, 2012). There is a variety of studies that investigate the commodification process of language in the political and economic conditions of new capitalism. For example, in her review Heller (2010) analyzes the role of language as a commodity in niche markets such as tourism, marketing and advertising, language teaching, translation, international call centers and performance art and she discusses the tension between language practices and ideologies. Language teaching as “distribution of linguistic resources” (Heller 2010, p. 108), the commodification of language and the concept of linguistic markets, where linguistic resources acquire value and are exchanged for profit, have been theorized in depth (Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu & Thompson 1991; Cameron 2012; Heller 2003, 2011; Duchene & Heller 2012; Silverstein 1996), mainly in relation to English.

Bourdieu pointed out that “priceless things have their price” and according to his definition of linguistic capital⁴, languages too—which, it can be argued, are priceless as cultural

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⁴ Linguistic Capital, Language Capital or Transnational Linguistic Capital? Omoniyi (2014) argues that a necessary distinction needs to be made between linguistic and language capital. As he explains, linguistic capital “concerns intra-language competition between standard and non-standard varieties or dialects while [language capital] is a phenomenon of language competition and hierarchy in multilingual contexts (p. 14). Although the European Union is a multilingual context where language competition and hierarchies are materialized, and language capital could be considered an appropriate term to discuss the accumulation of individual language knowledge, in Greece it is not. Multilingualism might be a very prominent, highly sought-after state in Greece, but it exists within an official monolingual context in which Greek is the undisputable prevailing national language and any other language is considered “foreign.” Another reason why the term “linguistic capital” will be preferred over “language capital” for this project is that language capital “applies to language communities discriminated by size and therefore deprived of their share of control of the local economy, especially in the developing world” (Omoniyi 2014, p. 14). Since this
artifacts—as well as their acquisition, have their price, which reflects their value as a commodity in a given socioeconomic context (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 47). Bourdieu (1977) defines linguistic capital as the capacity to produce speech for a particular market, from which linguistic competence derives its value and, like other tradable goods, this speech has an economic exchange value (p. 651). And even though linguistic capital and the power hierarchies it exemplifies mainly refer to variations within a certain language, this concept is valuable when examining how knowledge of other languages can provide benefits such as prestige and access to social and economic opportunities in national and global markets. Linguistic capital is only one form of embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977). Cultural capital encompasses the social assets that an individual might possess, and in the context of FLE both terms are useful tools in understanding the conceptualization of foreign language learning in Greece as an investment, and the perceived importance of prestigious language choice(s) in accruing social acceptance and securing a position in the global economy. In this project the term “speech” in Bourdieu’s definition of linguistic capital refers to competencies in foreign languages, and the linguistic market from which the linguistic capital of Greek FLLs derives its value is primarily Greece and

project examines foreign language knowledge of Greeks who make up the vast majority of the country’s population, and their connections to the rest of the EU, the nuances of Omoniyi’s term are not helpful to my analysis. Therefore, although Omoniyi proposes a very useful distinction that can provide more insight to language research in multilingual contexts, in this project I continue to use Bourdieu’s “linguistic capital.” Nevertheless, Gerhards (2012) also proposes a variation to the term. He argues that “under the condition of transnationalisation and Europeanisation, new skills become important in order to be able to act beyond the nation state ‘containers’” (p. 27) within which Bourdieu’s linguistic capital was conceived and developed, and therefore suggests the term “transnational linguistic capital.” According to Gerhards (2012) transnational linguistic capital refers to the foreign language knowledge that multilinguals possess and allows them to potentially develop transnational relationships. However, since for the purposes of my theoretical framework I am also discussing Bourdieu’s concepts of linguistic market and symbolic power, for the sake of consistency and clarity I choose to use Bourdieu’s linguistic capital, which for my research carries the meanings of Gerhard’s variation and denotes foreign language knowledge (and not competency in different varieties of the same language) that an individual possesses and has economic exchange value within the linguistic market of Greece. The term “linguistic capital” has been employed thusly in multiple works which discuss foreign language learning in Europe and Asia (see Loos, 2000; Mitsikopoulou, 2007; Park, 2011; Rubdy & Tan, 2008).
secondarily the EU, which can function as a broader linguistic market for Greek FLLs, since the membership of Greece guarantees free movement and employment rights for them within the Union.

Appadurai (1988) defines commodity as an item with both use and exchange value, and although language may be unlike other commercial products, it can still be “bought” and “sold” through services. Silverstein (1996), talked about the “commoditization” of Standard English in the U.S. He argued that “[a]s a commodity, Standard English can be made the object of a brisk commerce in goods-and-services for which experts make themselves available … and advertisers become focal personnel of personal decision-making to acquire the desired commodity for a price” (p. 291). Since, as Gerhards (2012) explains, “international experience, intercultural competence and multilingualism have become central qualifications” (p. 49) in the globalized economy, the resulting increased demand for language learning led to the nurturing of a thriving private FLE sector. Foreign language learning in and beyond English gained popularity via its intense promotion by the burgeoning private foreign language industry around the globe. Therefore, as Cameron (2012) points out, “one area of activity in which languages have long been treated as commercial commodities is foreign language instruction” (p. 354).

Languages have been treated as commercial commodities not only in foreign language instruction, but also in the domain of language certification. Certification can be seen by language professionals as “authentication” of a particular level of linguistic proficiency. The English as a Second (ESL) and Foreign Language (EFL) industries are most widely known across the globe for advertising and providing foreign language services for a fee, often associated with obtaining a certificate that grants access to professional or academic prospects. The First Certificate in English (FCE) by the Cambridge University, the International English
Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) certificates are only a few of the most popular ones learners pursue to certify their knowledge, depending on their academic and professional needs. Along the same lines, universities and institutions around the globe promote the national language of the countries they represent and offer certificates of different levels to certify the language proficiency of the learners. For instance, the Instituto Cervantes for Spanish and the Goethe Institute for German offer certification according to the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR), with certificates that span from the beginner A1 level to the proficient C2. Most often certificates of the B and C levels are required for academic and professional purposes.

Certification and assessment in general have become such vital parts of the language learning process in modern FLE, that there is increasing discussion on how they can affect language learning and language teaching through their washback effect, or by being used for gatekeeping purposes (Roever & McNamara, 2006, Tsagari, 2009; 2011, Mitsikopoulou, 2007). In Greece in particular, language certificates according to the CEFR, or other internationally acknowledged educational criteria, are so ubiquitous that in 2007 the official site of the British Embassy in Athens reported that approximately two thirds of all those worldwide who sit for the Cambridge Certificates in English are Greeks (Mitsikopoulou, 2007). Additionally, there is research which indicates that desire for certification is also connected to learner self-image, and in particular notions of self-esteem and success (Tsagari, 2009). Certification is an important part of FLE in Greece and there also appears to be a connection between certification and learner identity, and by extension learner investment. In this way, the commodification of language through the “objectification of cultural capital in the form of academic qualifications,” in this
case language certificates, is the specific aspect of language commodification this research refers to when addressing the commodified nature of modern FLE in Greece (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 245).

Other corrosive aspects of the commodified nature of contemporary foreign and second language education have also come into focus. For instance, modern language learning and teaching materials have come under critical scrutiny by educators and academics who point out that the “aspirational content” (Block, Gray & Holborow, 2013) and “touristic flavor” of textbooks (Kramsch, 2014, p. 308) shifts the focus of learning away from acquiring intercultural competence and fostering personal engagement with diversity. Additionally, the relationship between students and teachers in the context of modern private FLE has been problematized, with emphasis being placed on the service provider-customer relationship fostered between instructors and students in this environment and the pedagogical implications this dynamic can have on the learning process (Gray, 2013). Finally, it has been pointed out that in this context of modern private FLE, languages can be promoted as brands on the basis of their symbolic value, and language learning can become a commercialized activity where the emphasis is not on learning, but on imagined participation in Western culture (Kubota, 2011) or on conveying certain lifestyles associated with the “branded” languages learned (Schneider, 2010).

Language, as Bourdieu (1986) argues, is an asset with symbolic value and, since languages are treated as tradeable commodities in the modern economy and the FLE industry, their symbolic value can be examined within the broader framework of production and exchange. In this way, languages can be commodified not only in terms of economic value but also in terms of their symbolic value (Bourdieu 1977). As Ravasi and Rindova (2004) point out, symbolic value can be defined as “the set of social and cultural meanings associated with a product, which enable consumers to use it to communicate about their identity and social and status group
membership” (p. 2). They explain that “individuals value goods both because they perform practical functions … and because they can be used to signal social identity and status” (p. 2). More specifically, in the case of foreign language knowledge examined in this paper, as Duchêne & Heller (2012) point out, “it enables speakers to better meet their consumer needs such as bringing their messages across and getting the commodity they want,” which fulfils a practical function, “but it can also give them additional symbolic power and prestige” through its symbolic value (p. 2).

Thus, in addition to the benefits that a language learner can reap in terms of cultural, economic and linguistic capital, Bourdieu & Thompson (1991) also discuss how languages (or language varieties) can increase an individual’s symbolic capital. Bourdieu & Thompson (1991) define symbolic capital as the accumulated prestige or honor that an individual might possess as a result of amassing cultural, economic and linguistic capital which is considered valuable in a given socioeconomic context. Therefore, as Gerhards (2012) explains, multilingualism does not only have a practical or “instrumental” use, but also a symbolic one (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Since languages can function emblematically, they are often each associated with certain qualities: French with sophistication, English with “globalness” and modernity, or German with technological advancement (Cameron, 2012). These qualities make up the symbolic value of languages which is perceived to be transferred to the learner through the process of language learning. Modern identity has been described as a “project” that the individual continuously constructs and acquiring assets with the “right” symbolic value can be a means to contribute to this process (Giddens, 1991). The symbolic value, or “brand image” of languages, is not something that only exists as a disembodied concept in the minds of learners; it is constantly reinforced and constructed through images and narratives in language text books, classrooms,
mainstream media, and advertising campaigns employed to promote languages and attract learners. In Greece, this symbolic value is also reinforced by national agendas that promote and valorize multilingualism in certain languages, while devaluing multilingualism in languages and varieties that do not fit the narrative of modern Greek-European national identity.

If languages have long been treated as commercial commodities by the modern FLE industry (Cameron 2012), and if, as previously discussed, the symbolic value of commodities is as important as their practical properties for the consumers because they can be used to indicate social identity and status (Ravasi & Rindova, 2004), then borrowing the concept of symbolic consumption, as it relates to symbolic value from the field of sociology, is also useful to examine the role of the symbolic value of languages in Greek FLL investment. As Ravasi & Rindova (2004) explain, “early ideas about symbolic consumption derive from Veblen’s notion of conspicuous consumption, or consumption undertaken to demonstrate one’s affluence and affirm one’s status” (p. 3). The notion of symbolic consumption is helpful in shedding light on how foreign language learning can affirm an individual’s social status and prestige. According to Ravasi & Rindova (2004), “current views argue that symbolic consumption is a central characteristic of advanced capitalist societies” (p. 3) and taking into consideration that the commodification of language is taking place within (or due to) new capitalism and the globalized new economy (Heller, 2010), symbolic consumption, within the context of symbolic value, is an appropriate means to examine the symbolic value of foreign language learning and its role in Greek FLL investment.

Finally, symbolic consumption can be useful in examining another dimension of the symbolic value of language which plays a pivotal role in FLE: its “identity value.” As Ravasi & Rindova (2004) point out, “the purchase, ownership, or use of a product, position its owner in a
cultural coordinate system, which enables observers to make judgments… about social identity and … status. Thus, the symbolic value of a product is defined by its ability to generate meanings related to the social identity and status of the user” (p. 4). Therefore, the study of the symbolic value of foreign languages will also provide insight into the learners’ attempts to construct their identity and to make statements about their status through investing resources in certain language options. Baudrillard (1988) also asserts that “consumer goods do not simply have a ‘use’ or an ‘exchange’ value, but also an ‘identity value,’ in that patterns of purchase and consumption can be conceived as a code with which individuals express and define their identity within society” (p. 54). Considering that the goods in question here are languages, and the “patterns of purchase” Baudrillard is referring to translate to preferences for specific foreign languages in which learners invest their time and money, the study of their symbolic value is an important step in better comprehending FLL investment and its ramifications in terms of identity for Greek FLLs.

2.3 Literature Review: Investment

The symbolic dimension of language and the symbolic capital it represents also play an important role in language acquisition in the modern globalized economy. In the context of modern commodified FLE, learning foreign languages can also be a form of consumption meant to increase the individual’s symbolic capital, through which the individual can make statements about their identity (Kubota, 2011). By providing access to and legitimizing the acquisition of a variety of linguistic options, globalization creates a shift in the national monolingual paradigm,
which leads to the creation of complex new identities (Heller, 2010). For instance, “eikawa,” or learning English for leisure in Japan, “addresses aspirations to be included in a global imagined community [of English speakers] as well as a local community of like-minded people,” while helping the learners achieve socioeconomic mobility (Kubota, 2011, p. 473). This is just one example in which, even though globalization and capitalism treat language skills as marketable commodities “rather than expressions of true selves,” multilingualism can be the means to form a new, more global identity (Heller, 2010, p. 102).

Gerhards (2012), Mitsikopoulou (2007) and Schneider (2010) also discuss foreign language learning as a means to create a more international, or cosmopolitan as they characterize it, identity, which is the “evolution” of the monolingual national identity in the context of globalization. As Gerhards (2012) explains, multilingualism can create a new class consciousness to differentiate foreign language learners from other individuals who have remained “purely national” (p. 51). A multilingual cosmopolitan identity can be a means to participate in an “elitist lifestyle” (Schneider, 2010, p. 664), in which foreign language knowledge differentiates the individual by enabling them to claim a superior social position in relation to the “monolinguals” who are viewed as “backward,” since they are confined in the limits of the nation state due to their lack of language knowledge, which prohibits them from partaking in the globalized world order (Gerhards 2012, p. 51). Mitsikopoulou (2007) also points out that middle and upper-class parents who wish for their children to acquire foreign languages from a young age in Greece, do so intending for them to become “citizens of the world” (p. 240), supporting the idea that globalization has intensified and legitimized the concept of a cosmopolitan status (Silverstone 2007, p. 11).
Therefore, identity and sociocultural activity remain vital dimensions of language learning, even if in the era of globalization the language learning process appears to be mainly driven by instrumental reasons (as described by Gardner & Lambert, 1972), which are based on utilitarian purposes. Second (or foreign) language learning motivation has been elaborated beyond Gardner & Lambert’s (1972) social-psychology-based constructs. Equally important and influential motivational theories include Schumann’s (1997) work on neurobiology and motivation in second language acquisition, which “highlights the inseparable nature of cognitive, motivational, and emotional processes at the level of neural networks and mechanisms” (Ushioda, 2012), and Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational Self system (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009), which is centered on learners’ views of themselves in the future; both theories address the complicated nature of motivation. In recent years, alternative theoretical perspectives that explore the relationship between language learners and the language learning process have come to the fore to try addressing concerns in motivational theory. Hence, as Ushioda (2012) explains, motivational approaches based on sociocultural theory have emerged. These sociocultural-based approaches view motivation as “a dynamic situated process, emergent through the interactions among participants, context, and sociocultural activity” (Ushioda, 2012, p. 3). For example, Norton’s (Pierce, 1995; Norton, 2000, 2013; Darvin & Norton, 2015, 2016) construct of investment looks at motivation as emerging from potentially conflicting social relations and learner agendas.

The language choices of the Greek FLLs participating in this project, and their relationship to the languages learned, are analyzed through the theoretical lens of investment (Pierce 1995, Norton, 2000, 2013; Darvin & Norton 2015). Investment seeks to shed light on the relationship between a learner’s decision to commit to language learning and their identity (Early
& Norton, 2012), as well as between the learner and a constantly changing social world (Pierce, 1995). The examination of how learners relate to the social world through language learning and how their social and cultural histories interact with the languages they learn, resulting in the construction of new learner identities, is of immediate relevance to this study, which aims to investigate how the social and cultural meanings that comprise the symbolic value of languages affect learner identity formation. Hence, the construct of investment offers an appropriate theoretical framework in which to analyze the role of symbolic value in foreign language learning in Greece. It engages with the social, cultural and historical forces that shape and influence learners’ perceptions, while at the same time problematizing the relationship between power, identity and language learning (Norton 2013).

The three main theoretical pillars of investment are capital, identity, and ideology. According to Darvin & Norton (2015), where these three intersect, the learner’s investment in learning the target language is located. Unlike motivational theories that were based on social psychology (Gardner & Lambert 1972; Schumann 1997; Dörnyei & Ushioda 2009) and viewed learners as “unitary, fixed, and ahistorical,” Norton’s sociological construct of investment views identity as complex and in a constant state of flux, while being shaped by the learner’s multiple, and sometimes conflicting, desires (Norton 2013, p. 51). Norton (2013) explains that learner identity can change continuously across time and space. This study uses Norton’s paradigm and adopts the poststructuralist approach to identity and its relationship to language. Identity is not treated as homogenous and unitary, but as being in continuous development and transformation; it is viewed as “constituted in and through language,” and language is understood as not only defining “institutional practices, but also serving to construct our sense of ourselves- our subjectivity” (Norton 2013, p. 4).
Norton (2013) explains that “subjectivity in poststructuralism is understood as discursively constructed and as always socially and historically embedded,” while identities are “contingent, shifting and context-dependent” and not just “given by social structures or ascribed by others;” they are “also negotiated by agents” (p. 5). Thus, when investigating the role of symbolic value on learner investment this study takes into consideration the shifting and context-dependent learner subjectivities that are influenced by social and historical factors relevant to the particular spatial and temporal context in which this research is taking place. Also, this research acknowledges that language learning is inextricably linked to identity creation and transformation, and that languages are never just “neutral mediums of communication but are understood with reference to social meaning” (Norton 2013, p. 45), indexing the foreign language “Other” that is compared and contrasted to the “Self” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). The process of language learning never takes place in a social, political or historical vacuum and hence “a learner’s investment in the target language may be complex, contradictory and in a state of flux” (Norton 2013, p. 51). According to Norton (2013), investment must be understood within a sociological context, and aims to make a meaningful connection between “a learner’s desire and commitment to learn a language, and their complex and changing identity” (p. 6).

By investing in the target language, learners invest in their own identity (Darvin & Norton, 2016), since commitment to learning a language does not only have to do with motivation. When learners choose to invest in a language they do so because they expect to accrue a “wider range of symbolic … and material resources … which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital and social power” (Norton 2013, p. 6). Norton’s construct of investment is influenced by social theory and Bourdieu’s economic metaphors concerning the different forms of capital. Capital is problematized in investment to shed light at how perceptions
of the capital value of individuals shift in different linguistic markets, resulting in learners losing or gaining power (Darvin & Norton 2015). Furthermore, through the concept of capital the construct of investment allows us to examine how learners perceive their own linguistic resources and cultural capital as affordances that will be enriched through language learning, enabling them to (re)shape their identity, and/or claim imagined identities.

The notions of imagined identities, imagined futures, and imagined communities are extensions of interest in identity research and the theoretical construct of investment. Learner identities should be understood in relation to their investment in the real world and in the worlds made possible by language learning; as Kanno & Norton (2012) explain, “‘the question ‘Who am I?’ cannot be understood apart from the question, ‘What can I do?’” (p. 199). This is also one of the elements that differentiates investment from instrumental motivation as learners do not only learn languages to fulfil short or long-term practical purposes, but also to make possible desirable futures, or versions of themselves, attainable. Learners’ connection to communities that are not immediately accessible, through the power of imagination, is also a central element in understanding the complex relationship between language learning and identity. Norton (2013) explains that in many language classrooms the target language community “may be a community of the imagination, a desired community that offers possibilities for an enhanced range of identity options in the future” (p. 3). Learners might wish to identify with members of the imagined community on a professional, social or cultural level, and language learning is what makes it possible. Therefore, investment in this type of imagined communities strongly influences learners’ commitment to language learning and identity construction (Kanno & Norton, 2012). Imagined communities are central in understanding the relationship between language learning and identity, since learners’ perceptions of these communities and their
reasons for investing in them allow us to examine how national ideologies, globalization and transnationalism influence learner identity construction and language learning (Kanno & Norton, 2012). In this way, the construct of investment recognizes language learning as a social practice whereby learners exercise agency by investing in what they deem enriches their capital and expands their identity options and their access to diverse communities, real or imagined (Early & Norton 2012).

However, imagination is influenced, and even shaped, by social ideologies and hegemonies (Kanno & Norton, 2012). By recognizing language learning as a social practice, investment examines how it is affected and shaped by ideology, while implicated in the operation of power (Norton 2017). The focus on ideology enables us to investigate and problematize notions that are considered normative, and to examine “how power manifests itself materially in the practices of a classroom, workplace, or community; the positioning of interlocutors, and the structuring of habitus” (Darvin & Norton 2015, p. 40). This component of investment plays a central role in understanding how identities are shaped through language learning, especially in the 21st century, when the latest advancements in technology make it possible to simultaneously occupy several virtual or physical spaces with conflicting ideologies, causing the constant repositioning of learners (Darvin & Norton 2016). Furthermore, engaging with ideology allows comprehension of how learners’ beliefs and attitudes towards their cultural, national and personal histories interact with the languages they learn, and how this process shapes the construction of new learner identities and defines the values of linguistic capital. By recognizing language learning as a social practice, investment examines how it is affected and shaped by ideology, while implicated in the operation of power (Norton 2017).
Several studies have examined learner investment around the globe and how capital, identity, ideology and notions of imagined identities, futures and communities are implicated in this process. Ollerhead’s (2012) analysis of the extent to which teachers’ pedagogical practices are responsive to learners’ developing and multiple identities in low-level ESL classrooms in Australia drew on the constructs of investment and imagined communities to conclude that the ways learners imagine their futures are integral to their identity as learners and their relationship to language learning. Furthermore, multiple studies of investment in English language learning and digital skills in Uganda (Early & Norton, 2014; Norton, Jones, & Ahimbisibwe, 2011; Tembe & Norton, 2008), indicate that imagined futures and identities are central in learner investment. The studies demonstrate that both students and instructors are highly committed to the learning and teaching processes since they feel it expands their future possibilities by increasing their social power and cultural capital, consequently extending the range of identities available to them. Similarly, Norton & Kamal (2003), found that Pakistani student investment in literacy, technological advancements, and English made participation in multiple imagined communities possible, allowing students to claim hybrid identities that were part of a peaceful future.

Dagenais (2003) employed the construct of investment to examine immigrant parents’ desire for their children to become multilinguals, explaining that investment in language education was a means of enriching their children’s capital and securing their access to imagined language communities domestically and abroad. Mohammadian & Norton (2017) investigated FLL investment in language learning that takes place in English language institutes (ELI) in Iran. The study focused on learner investment in language learning outside public school, as the increased communicative competence they acquire in ELIs enhances the range of professional,
academic and personal identities available to them; this is especially true for women, for whom ELIs can also function as safe recreational and/or career spaces. Additionally, Gu (2008), examined how English learning enabled learners in a Chinese university to construct multiple identities to position themselves in the different communities they were participating in, while placing emphasis on the changing economic, sociocultural and political context of modern FLE. Gao et al. (2008) studied the complex motives underlying the creation of an English discussion group by Chinese research students in Hong Kong to conclude, like Gu (2008), that a more sociocultural and sociopolitical perspective is necessary to deepen our understanding of FLL behaviors in the context of modern FLE. Finally, investment has also been employed to study language learning as a form of leisure and consumption. Kubota (2011) studied adult FLL investment in learning English as a leisure activity in Japan. She explains that what can attract students to a language is not necessarily linguistic or socioeconomic development, but the ability to participate in immediate and imagined communities. Students are committed to English learning as it allows them to claim membership in the community of fellow language learners and in the imagined global community of English speakers.

In this way, by problematizing the notions of imagined futures, identities and communities, while focusing on capital, ideology and identity, the construct of investment “captures the complex relationship between power, identity and language learning” (Norton 2013, p. 50). Hence, it is a versatile tool to study Greek FLL commitment to multilingualism as it makes it possible to examine the economic, social, cultural and historical forces that shape the learning process and power relationships that influence learners on both local and global levels. Investment is a useful construct in an empirical study of this kind because it considers not only the intrinsic connection between language learning and identity, but also the political economy of
language learning and the power dynamics that shape it, allowing more thorough comprehension of the multifaceted nature of language learning within the context of modern private FLE and the globalized economy.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

To investigate Greek FLL investment in multilingualism and how the symbolic value of foreign languages can affect it, I explore learners’ perceptions about the languages in which they invest time and money to learn. This allows me to examine how learners believe different language choices enrich their capital and enable them to claim symbolic and material resources, as well as membership to imagined communities that make different imagined identities and futures possible. Like other commodities, the symbolic value of foreign languages is comprised of the social and cultural meanings associated with them in a given market, or in this case, the FLE context in which they are “consumed” through paid FLE services (Ravasi & Rindova, 2004). Therefore, I look into the language attitudes and ideologies of FLLs through which these cultural and social meanings are conveyed. These language attitudes and ideologies are based on assumptions that are influenced by economic, social, historical and political events concerning the country in which each language is spoken natively and the relationship that exists (or existed) between said country and Greece.

Although language attitudes and ideologies originate in different disciplines, the former in social psychology and the latter in linguistic anthropology, and they are theoretically constructed in different ways (objectivist approaches for language attitudes and interpretive for language ideologies), they have been frequently used interchangeably to denote the same thing, namely beliefs about language. Nevertheless, I do not use both terms to express the same
meaning. For the purposes of this research, language attitudes refer to beliefs and behavioral
tendencies that are connected to the values of individuals and have cognitive, affective and
conative components (McGroarty, 1995). There are internalized dispositions about languages
that learners might, or might not be aware of, and they are enacted in different ways. For
example, if a Greek chooses to learn Spanish over German as their second (or third) foreign
language because they believe that, even though Germany is politically and economically
stronger than Spain, German does not “sound nice,” I consider this an attitude that leads the
individual towards a specific behavior, that is, to invest their resources in one foreign language
over another.

Even though language ideologies have been defined very similarly as "sets of beliefs
about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language
…use,” (Silverstein 1979, p. 60) here I am using the term to denote beliefs about foreign
languages on a sociopolitical level. For example, I consider the tendency of the Greek
government to acknowledge languages of the EU (in public education or even advertising on
television or the streets) while ignoring those of the neighboring Balkan countries, which are also
the languages spoken by the majority of immigrants in Greece, an expression of language
ideologies. When I discuss language ideologies in this research I highlight discursive, or
practical, consciousness; I refer to beliefs articulated by officials, language users or learners who
are aware of possessing these beliefs whose expressions are perceived as an aspect of a larger
political and economic system (Silverstein, 1979). Therefore, in terms of positionality, I consider
individuals as functioning within a sociopolitical system, whereas in the case of language
attitudes, more emphasis is placed on individual feelings and expressions that have no necessary
connection to political economic structures or hierarchies. In this way, for this project language
attitudes and ideologies are perceived as convergent and partially overlapping, while at the same time different in several aspects\(^5\). I consider language ideologies as reflecting a larger system; I view them as an overarching principle which connects sociopolitical structures, people and languages. These language ideologies then provide the wider context in which individual FLL language attitudes are created and shaped.

Thus, this research asks the following questions:

i. What learners, within an officially monolingual nation state who do not plan to immigrate or study abroad, perceive the benefits of multilingualism beyond English to be in terms of their identity and capital, and why are they considered so important as to drive learners, or their parents, to invest considerable amounts of resources in acquiring multiple foreign languages from a young age, in the context of modern commodified Greek FLE?

ii. What are the language attitudes and ideologies that give foreign languages their social and cultural meanings (symbolic value)?

iii. How do these beliefs affect FLL decisions of where to invest their resources when choosing to learn a foreign language? In other words, how do perceptions about the symbolic value of languages shape understandings about what languages are “worth” learning because they are “better investments”?

iv. How are these language choices and the symbolic value associated with them perceived by learners to define their identity, make different futures possible, and grant membership to (imagined) communities inside and outside Greece during a

\(^5\) For a graphic representation of this differentiation see Appendix I.
time when the country’s economy has been in recession for the better part of a decade?

To answer these questions and explore how the symbolic value of languages influences the formation of linguistic capital and identity creation, and consequently Greek FLL investment in multilingualism, I adopted the perspective of the learner.

3.2 Participants

To explore learner investment, I conducted individual semi-structured interviews with thirty-three Greek FLLs, seventeen male and sixteen female. The participants were born and raised in Greece, where they lived permanently. All were Greek nationals from monolingual families, which they described as lower-middle or middleclass. All participants were adults, twenty-five to thirty-eight years old at the time of interviewing and held a university or college degree. The first interviewees I contacted were personal acquaintances who met the selection criteria for this research. They then introduced me to other FLLs, either their friends or relatives, making it possible to recruit the necessary number of participants for this project. This “snowballing” sampling strategy allowed me to gather participants from different parts of Greece and of different socioeconomic backgrounds, which resulted in a versatile data pool.

Snowballing was a suitable sampling strategy for this research as it benefits inductive analysis (Miles et al., 2014). Most participants had completed their language studies at the time of interviewing, except for seven, who were still attending classes at private FLIs for their third or fourth foreign languages. Consequently, all of them discussed their long-term commitment to the
languages they had learned as children or teenagers retrospectively, while those who were still attending classes also discussed how they experienced their investment in the languages they were learning at the time of interviewing.

The criteria for participant selection were the following: i) the entrance of Greece in the EU in 1981 signaled a great cultural, political, economic and ideological shift in the country. The educational reforms that promoted multilingualism changed the face of foreign language learning education by making foreign languages mandatory in public school. This in turn influenced Greeks’ attitudes towards foreign language learning and their investment in language learning outside the public school. Therefore, participants had to either have been born at the end of the 1970’s, which meant that they were just starting primary school when Greece entered the EU, or during the decade that followed 1981, when the ripple effect from this landmark in Greek history was still very prominent. Furthermore, participants had to have learned these languages as ii) foreign (not heritage) and iii) they (or their parents) had to have paid for private FLE services to learn them. Additionally, participants had to have iv) attended classes for more than three years (usually until they received their first certificate) and therefore invested a considerable amount of resources in language learning, v) and they had to have completed this process for two or more foreign languages. This way they, or their parents, had to have selected where to invest their resources from all the available foreign language options in the private Greek FLE industry. Participants who learned just one foreign language were not included in this study, because that language would have been English, and as noted earlier, there is a wealth of literature on why people invest in it if they have to learn one foreign language. Given the ubiquity of English and its function as a lingua franca, the purpose of this study is to investigate why learners are willing to invest in multiple foreign languages, even if there is little practical application for
multilingualism in their everyday lives. As described above, language learning and private FLE have become so widespread during the past thirty-five years in Greece, that finding participants who met the requirements for this research was not a challenge.

The FLLs interviewed, like many individuals of their generation, did not just receive the free foreign language instruction provided in the Greek educational system (primary, through university), but also paid to learn two or more foreign languages in private FLIs, or to receive private tutoring at home. The languages most commonly learned were English in combination to one, two, or even three of the following: German, French, Italian and Spanish; one participant learned English and Swedish. All participants started studying English outside of school as their first foreign language at seven or eight years of age. Furthermore, 97% of the participants interviewed studied the language for approximately six to nine years in total, until they sat the exam for their first (usually the upper intermediate B2 as defined by the CEFR), or second (usually the proficient C2 as defined by the CEFR) certificate in English, while 3% did not obtain a certificate in English or in other languages they learned. The second foreign language choices and the combination of languages learned by the participants are summarized in Charts 1 and 2 below.
Chart 1: Second Foreign Language Choice

- 50% for English
- 38% for a combination
- 6% for French
- 3% for Spanish
- 3% for Italian
- 3% for Swedish

Chart 2: Participant Languages

- English-German: 13 participants
- English-French: 9 participants
- English-Italian: 2 participants
- English-Swedish: 1 participant
- English-French-German: 1 participant
- English-French-Italian: 2 participants
- English-Spanish-Italian: 1 participant
- English-German-Italian: 3 participants
- English-French-German-Spanish: 1 participant
Participants started learning their second foreign language (most often French or German) one or two years after they started learning English at a private FLI. Participants continued their study of the second foreign language for approximately less than six years until they sat the exam for their first (usually the upper intermediate B2 as defined by the CEFR) or second (usually the proficient C2 as defined by the CEFR) certificate. Participants who learned other languages as their second started studying them in their mid-teens; the duration of studies was approximately four years. Participants who learned more than three foreign languages (22%) did so during their undergraduate studies or later in life and studied them for less than four years. Finally, 73% of the interviewees had obtained a certificate (B2 or higher level) for all foreign languages learned (not including English). The age at which participants started studying their first, second and third (or fourth) foreign languages, the time they spent studying them, and their certification in these languages is summarized in Charts 3, 4 and 5 below.
Chart 4: Duration of studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Median Years Spent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French or German as second language</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian, Spanish or Swedish as second language</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third and fourth foreign languages</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 5: Participant certification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Percentage with Certificate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French or German as second language</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian, Spanish or Swedish as second language</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third and fourth foreign languages</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 Data Collection

Each participant was interviewed individually. The interviews took place during the summers of 2017 and 2018, were conducted in Greek, and lasted thirty to seventy minutes each. The interviews were conducted at coffee shops, which allowed comfortable conversation and clear recording of the interview, in several locations in Greece (Athens, Corinth and Lemnos). The interview sessions were recorded using a voice recorder (Olympus VN-5500PC). Although the threshold for meaningful data in studies with qualitative methodologies has been reported to be at twelve interviews (Guest et al., 2006), I found that at seventeen interviews I had not reached data saturation. Therefore, since the interview process was enlightening in terms of my topic and I had easy access to individuals who were willing to participate in this study, I conducted thirty-three interviews in total, by which point I had reached data saturation and I did not come across new themes.

Interviewing is a methodology that illuminates the relationship between language learning and learner identity, as it promotes detailed discussion and elaboration of participants’ thoughts, beliefs and feelings (Pavlenko, 2007). This discussion provided insight into attitudes and ideologies towards different language choices, and consequently revealed the internal processes that shaped their investment in multilingualism. The personal narratives of FLLs made it possible to explore how symbolic value was perceived and experienced by learners, how it practically affected and guided consumer (learner) choices of where to invest their resources, and how this investment affected their identity. The semi-structured format emerged organically as the most suitable methodology for this research: all participants were asked the same core questions, which allowed comparability of answers, while the ability to deviate from the
interview guide, if necessary, provided the freedom to expand on and explore other useful aspects and dimensions of the topic (Yow, 2014).

The interview protocol was comprised of twenty-two questions, organized according to five main domains (see Appendix II): i) introductory questions on the linguistic background of the participant (questions one to three), ii) construction of linguistic capital, where the criteria for language choice and the perceived benefits in terms of learner capital were analyzed (questions four to ten), iii) objectified capital, where the commodification of FLE and the role of certificates in language learning were examined (questions eleven to fourteen), iv) symbolic value of foreign languages, where ideologies and attitudes pertaining to different foreign language learning options available in Greece were investigated (questions fifteen to eighteen), and v) symbolic value and learner identity, which investigated foreign language learning and symbolic value in relation to participants’ imagined futures and identities, and their affiliation to imagined communities (questions nineteen to twenty-one). Question twenty-two was a wrap-up question, in case the participant wished to add or elaborate more on a particular point before the interview concluded, to ensure that there was no information the participant would like to share that was not included in the interview (Morrissey, 2006).

The questions of the first domain were designed to warm the participants up, while the questions of the second and third domains encouraged them to discuss their language choices and delve deeper into their relationship with language learning and multilingualism within the commodified context of modern private FLE in Greece. For instance, if language learning is a wise investment only because it grants access to the globalized economy and the international network of communications, as the vast majority indicated in the beginning of the interviews to justify learning multiple languages, participants were asked to discuss why do “Greeks” need to
learn several languages since English seems to be adequate to achieve these goals (question ten). I chose to pose several questions about “Greeks” in general, as it took the pressure off participants who felt more comfortable explaining and justifying tendencies and behaviors of the larger group rather than personal ones (Aiken, 1997). The questions of domain iv) (symbolic value of foreign languages) were meant to prompt participants to discuss their perceptions about different languages, and in this way delve into the cultural and social meanings that form their symbolic value. I let participants mention the languages they felt are important, without guiding them towards a specific direction. All participants discussed the same languages—English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Russian and Chinese—even if they did not choose to learn the specific languages. This homogeneity was indicative of ethnocentric narratives of “important foreign languages” that shaped FLLs choices and consequently FLL investment.

Furthermore, since symbolic value is also associated with concepts of prestige and social status (Ravasi & Rindova, 2004), questions fifteen to eighteen aimed through the discussion of language attitudes and ideologies to explore how participants understood “prestige” in relation to different languages. Since the questions of this domain prompted participants to mention specific languages, I let them discuss the concepts of prestige and social status in relation to the foreign languages they just indicated or others they found more appropriate for this topic, without providing them a list of languages to consider. The open-ended nature of these questions encouraged participants to elaborate on social and cultural perceptions that determine what languages they thought were prestigious, as well as to discussing social, historical and political narratives that lead to the formation of these perceptions.

The final domain of the protocol examined symbolic value and FLL identity. Although language learning is undoubtedly an “experience of identity,” I encountered a certain amount of
“push-back” when trying to pose questions that presented foreign language learning as an activity linked to identity formation (Wenger, 1998, p. 38). For this reason, I again opted for posing the questions from a third-person perspective. Hence, in the final section of the interview, participants for example were asked if they believed that “Greeks have the inclination to learn foreign languages and if so, why” (question nineteen). My final question, “What do you think language learning/ knowledge of foreign languages means for Greeks? Why is it so popular?” (question twenty-one) prompted illuminating answers on how learning specific languages can provide access to imagined communities in and outside Greece and make imagined futures attainable. Finally, sharing the same cultural and historical background with the participants benefited me for the purposes of this research. When discussing the values assigned to different foreign languages interviewees acknowledged that they often stem from “racist” or “prejudiced” views of other peoples and their languages, and they appeared to feel more comfortable discussing these topics with an insider who was less likely to “misunderstand” or judge them (Yow, 2014).

3.4 Data Analysis

Upon completion of the data collection, the interviews were transcribed fully and translated from Greek to English. The participants were given the option to read through the final transcription in English, since I used direct quotations to illustrate points in my analysis (Yow, 2014). Considering that all of the participants are fluent in at least two foreign languages, one of them always being English, those who chose to read the transcript of their interview were able to
comprehend it. All participant names cited in this research are pseudonyms. To ensure that language expressing attitudes and ideologies was translated consistently throughout the interviews, a list of the most frequent terms and phrases appearing throughout the data was created. The translation equivalent of these Greek terms in English was decided depending on the context in which they occurred, striving for the highest attainable degree of dynamic equivalence (Malmkjær & Windle, 2011). Additionally, intricacies of speech were edited out of the transcripts, as emphasis was placed on meaning. The transcripts were deidentified and analyzed, following the recommendations outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006).

Themes in the data were identified, analyzed and reported through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is independent of theory (Boyatzis, 1998); however, it can be informed by different theoretical frameworks, making it ideal for the purposes of this empirical study, which aims to investigate Greek FLL investment in multilingualism and how it is affected by the symbolic value of languages. I followed Braun & Clarke’s (2006) suggestions of how to conduct thematic analysis: after familiarizing myself with the data—through the processes of transcription/translation and proofreading—I started generating the initial codes across the entire data set. To facilitate coding and analysis, I used Dedoose computer software, which is designed for qualitative and mixed-methods research. I searched for themes by collating codes relevant to each theme. I initially identified themes which were strongly linked to the data inductively, through a bottom up approach. Additionally, since my analysis was driven by the sociological construct of investment and my focus on the social and cultural meanings that comprise the symbolic value of languages, themes were elaborated deductively. This theoretical, or top-down approach, resulted in a detailed analysis of the data according to my theoretical framework. Furthermore, the themes were identified at a latent, or interpretative level, which allowed me to
explore “underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualizations and ideologies” that inform my data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). After reviewing the themes in relation to the coded extracts, I refined them and generated clear definitions for each one. Finally, by selecting compelling extracts from the interviews to illustrate points in my discussion, I produced a scholarly report of the analysis which relates it to my research questions and preexisting literature on FLL investment and symbolic value and identity (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
CHAPTER 4
Greek Foreign Language Learner Investment in Multilingualism

4.1 Investment in English

As Heller (2010) points out, the new focus on multilingualism in the globalized economy mainly concerns proficiency in English. English started solidifying its place as an “international” language following World War II. This was due to the powerful economy, military and industry in the United States, Great Britain, and the Commonwealth states, as well as the great advancements in the fields of technology and research and their influential entertainment industry (Ganahl, 2001). Global promotion of English through the massive English as a Second Language (ESL) industry and standardized testing also contributed to its status of a “global” language. Even though Mandarin and Spanish have also become increasingly important internationally (Graddol, 2006), the global reach of English is indisputable. English is the language of international commerce, the de facto lingua franca within the EU (European Cultural Foundation, 1999), the dominant language in sciences and scientific publications, and an obligatory subject of study in schools around the world (Ammon, 2011). Today, 52.9% of the top ten million websites online are in English (McCarthy, 2018). Hence, English is considered an instrument of modernization, economic progress and social, educational and occupational success, causing it to be perceived as “the single most valuable commodity in the global linguistic market, creating added incentives for individuals, families, companies and nations to invest resources in it” (Cameron, 2012, p. 353).
If economic rationalism increasingly motivates modern foreign language learning (Heller, 2003), and if English is usually the most popular foreign or second language choice, since it is posed as the language that will provide the learner with the highest economic benefits by allowing access to international markets and the globalized economy, one could wonder if learning languages other than English, or after learning English, would be a desirable endeavor for learners with limited resources to invest in language learning. In the EU in particular, the idea of a “learning society” promulgated in the “1995 White Paper on Education and Training, Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society,” promoted contact between member states and multilingualism through learning each other’s languages. Multilingualism was believed to forge a common European identity. The same White Paper cited several intercultural and cognitive benefits of learning three community languages and noted that multilingualism is a vital part of European identity and citizenship (Phillipson, 2003). While English continues to be the most studied language within the EU, in 2015 the European Commission “Languages and Employability Report” indicated that knowing two or more foreign languages (one of them being English) has a strong association with employment in the 24 Member States. Knowledge of foreign languages (most often English, French, and German), in combination with the right of free movement, which allows individuals to seek employment and live in every EU member state, can offer more educational and professional opportunities to multilingual individuals (Gerhards, 2012).

English is one of the foreign languages taught in Greece, but it stands out among all others in terms of importance. It was the first foreign language to be introduced in public schools and, as my data analysis will show, learners feel it plays a central role in several aspects of their lives in Greece. The FLLs interviewed had little practical use for multilingualism beyond English
as they had no plans to migrate, study or work abroad as adults or children learning foreign languages. Nevertheless, they (often at the behest of their parents) chose to pursue one (or even two) additional foreign languages in private FLIs, frequently from a young age. This is due to their belief that knowledge of English is not enough, and that learning additional foreign languages is a crucial part of the individual’s capital. In this chapter, Greek FLL investment in English will be discussed in terms of capital, identity and ideology, as a first step to better comprehending Greek FLL investment in multilingualism, as well as the social and cultural meanings associated with foreign language choices available in private FLE in Greece and how they affect learner commitment to multilingualism.

The “brand image” of English and its promise for a better future to learners has been extensively discussed due to the ubiquity of English language teaching and learning around the world (Cameron, 2012; Gray, 2013; Grin, 2001; Park, 2011). My findings in terms of the symbolic value of English as perceived by the Greek FLLs also agree with what is now common knowledge, namely that among other qualities, English is associated with modernity, wealth, power, prestige, globalness, globalization, neoliberalism and human capital (Cameron, 2012; Pennycook, 2007). Therefore, unlike the chapters that follow, I do not dedicate a separate section to the symbolic value of English as perceived by Greek FLLs. For the sake of conciseness, in this section I delve directly into Greek FLL investment in the language, which I discuss in relation to the social and cultural meanings associated with it and how they influence learner commitment to English.

Thus, to begin with, foreign language learning was deemed of high importance by the participants, who viewed it as an essential part of their cultural capital since, as Kassie pointed out, “[Greeks] have associated language learning with the typical qualifications someone should
have.” The perception of foreign language learning as something “very basic” in terms of the individual’s education is further enhanced by the fact that foreign languages are a compulsory subject in public school, as Hellen explained. She noted that this is the reason why “everyone shares this mentality and have their children learn foreign languages at private foreign language institutes.” According to Annetta, language learning in Greece complements the individual’s cultural capital in the most fundamental way, because “if someone doesn’t know at least one foreign language [Greeks] believe that they have failed in an area of their life. It appears as something more serious than it truly is in reality. Someone might be successful in other academic areas, but if they don’t know a foreign language, their other qualifications lose their value.” Hence, as Georgia explained, “foreign languages have become a big part of [Greeks’] lives, like English for example.”

English was described as an indispensable tool everyone should possess; the “absolutely basic skill.” Throughout the interviews, English was described as such a core skill that knowledge of the language was perceived of equal importance to digital literacy, and these two skills were frequently mentioned in relation to each other as literacies of power (Mitsikopoulou, 2007). Cathy demonstrated this point when she explained that “in 2017 [Greeks] consider someone who is twenty years old and does not know English as being illiterate. If you don't know English and how to use computers, you are considered illiterate because you cannot do anything.” Furthermore, knowledge of English was often identified with the ability to use the Internet and these two skills were perceived as interrelated, since as Sara explained, “a person who does not know English is illiterate; they cannot use the Internet.” Throughout the interviews, lack of any of these two skills was equated to illiteracy. English was deemed essential to use the
internet, social media and technology in general, since not all instruction manuals, application or
program menus are available in Greek.

Although English is officially a foreign language in Greece, its perception as a “second
language” or as a staple for the cultural capital of those who live in Greece was a recurring theme
throughout the data. This is further demonstrated by Annetta, who pointed out that “since
everyone speaks English, it has become like our second language. You speak the language of
your country, and if you don't speak English you are illiterate.” Along the same lines, Annie
explained that her husband had to attend a private FLI as an adult to freshen up his knowledge of
English because “if you don’t know [English] you are considered illiterate,” and she concluded
that knowledge of the language “is taken so much for granted in Greece that people who don’t
know [English] are considered illiterate.” In this way, equating lack of English knowledge with
illiteracy was one more theme that emerged.

Furthermore, according to Hellen, “[Greeks] consider learning English as basic and
necessary as going to [Greek] school.” The primacy given to English by all interviewees was so
great that knowledge of the language was equated to knowledge of one’s mother-tongue and/or
acquiring a university degree. For example, Paul stated that “English is an essential language, as
important as Greek” for people living in Greece, while Fanis explained that it is imperative for
children in Greece to “attend English lessons, it isn't something secondary like other after-school
activities are often perceived to be.” Additionally, as Sal noted, when looking for a job his
knowledge of English was more useful to him than his university degree, and for this reason he
believed that “other than your mother-tongue, learning English is essential.” Therefore, many
participants, like Kassie, described learning English at a young age as “self-evident,” or as an
established fact, like Paul, who explained that he “learned English because it was a given that you would learn it.”

This belief is justified by the perceived ubiquity of English in everyday life. As Silvia put it, “I learned English because [in Greece] everything is in English.” Participants discussed how they encountered English everywhere in their lives: product descriptions and ingredients at the supermarket are in English, the majority of advertisements on television and radio are peppered with English words and slogans, and journalists, as well as political analysts on television, increasingly use more and more English terminology to discuss the daily news. English was also viewed as essential for academic and professional purposes inside and outside Greece, with all participants indicating that the language was of great use to them throughout their undergraduate and graduate studies, and in every type of employment they held or sought. Additionally, it was pointed out that English was necessary to enjoy entertainment like movies and music (although anything shown on Greek television or cinema is either subtitled or dubbed), and to be able to access news sources online to get informed, because Greek news sources were described as “limited,” “unreliable,” and “partisan.” Lack of proficiency in the language was portrayed as a severe social “disadvantage,” or, as Fanis described it, a “a problem for [the individual] and the people around them,” because English was deemed necessary to function in all aspects of everyday life, from going to the supermarket and using technology, to being able to follow and comprehend the development of television news. The ubiquity of the language in all aspects of everyday life made participants feel that “in Greece, English is already the second language that exists,” as Paul noted.

In general, English was perceived to have such high importance that participants felt they had little choice other than to learn the language as children. Fanis explained that as a child he
“was forced to learn English,” although later on he “realized that it was essential to know the language.” Similarly, multiple participants explained that learning English was considered something compulsory, like Jessica, who stated, “I didn't study the language because I wanted to, but because I had to.” Stella noted that she was “compelled to learn it.” Barbara explained that “learning English is considered obligatory by [Greeks], so they will learn it from a young age.”

In general, many participants commented on the imposition of the language on them from a young age, not so much in school but as an extracurricular activity for which they had to attend extra classes. However, all of them seemed to agree it was a necessary process they had to go through to acquire this basic skill. Thus, Fanis explained that as a child he was under a lot of pressure to cope with the workload for school and after-school English language lessons, but “later on [he] realized that it was essential to know English,” adding that even if as a child he found the process strenuous, “in the short run, you realize that knowing English is an asset.”

The theme of English as a compulsory skill emerged throughout the data, with many participants noting that they were “forced” or “compelled” to study the language outside school at a young age by their parents. For example, Michael also explained that he did not choose to learn English. He said that “English was a one-way street. At some point my parents told me I had to learn English, like all parents do with their children. Parents tell their children that they need to learn certain skills, and my parents told me I had to learn English. It wasn't a matter under discussion.” Parental agency regarding English language learning was stressed by most participants, like James, who said that “as a child I didn't have too much of a say on what language I would choose to study, but I learned English, which is a necessary language.” Most participants stated that their parents chose for them to start learning English in a private FLI at a very young age. When asked why that was the case, the introduction of the language in public
school as a compulsory subject was perceived as a secondary reason while societal influences were given as the primary justification why parents had their children attend after-school classes in English. As Stavros put it, “[parents] were also influenced by other parents and their social surroundings, since it was common that children would learn English from a young age, even though at that time they might not have been aware of the importance of the language.” Additionally, participants explained that if someone did not attend English classes at a private FLI as a child, it was perceived as a sign of “severe financial difficulties.” Therefore, sending one’s children to a private FLI at a young age to acquire certification in English was deemed as “compulsory” for societal reasons as well.

In terms of “importance,” English was characterized as the language of “international communication,” a “global language of business and commerce” which enabled “contact” between Greeks and the rest of the world. Participants perceived it as a powerful tool, a lingua franca they could use to communicate with speakers of other languages who visit Greece as tourists, or when they travel abroad. Language learning as enabling communication between Greece as a nation and the outside world to avoid “isolation” emerged as a theme throughout the interviews. Several participants indicated that Greek is only spoken in Greece and Cyprus and therefore, Greek “is not a powerful or strong language,” alluding to the low communication value of Greek. Stella stated that Greek “is a language that is not similar to any other. For example, Italians can more or less communicate with the French, the Spanish or the Portuguese. Germans can more or less communicate with the Austrians. [Greeks] can't communicate with anyone. So, we have to strive to make communication possible.” Similarly, Jason said that “Greek is not a widely spoken language, so we learn foreign languages to communicate with others […] since Greek is not a powerful language.”
The size and perceived political and economic influence of Greece were also factors that influenced investment in English; for example, Sara pointed out that “Greece is a small country and Greek is spoken by few people, so Greeks are obliged to learn English.” Language learning as a means to partake in “power” and the disadvantaged position of Greek in this hierarchical order of powerful languages was another prominent theme throughout the data. For example, in the light of the political and economic developments of the past 10 years, during which the economy of Greece has been closely monitored by international and European institutions, Michael noted that Greece “needs to collaborate with other foreign countries” which are more powerful. He explained that “by learning English [Greeks] will collaborate with other countries, which we believe is necessary.” He believed that Greek as a language “is not one of the powerful ones; it is not spoken by many people and therefore you cannot expand your business only by speaking Greek,” and he concluded that “[y]es, Greeks are avid language learners because their mother-tongue is not very useful to them for conducting business.” Along the same lines, Stavros explained that “English is the prevailing language that you have to know and the better you know how to use it, the better for you.” Learning English was perceived as a means to overcome the communicative or power shortcomings of Greek at an international level, since as Stavros observed, “the most powerful countries in the world nowadays speak English, so if the rest of the world doesn't want to be isolated they have to learn English to be able to communicate; that for me is being in a position of power.” In this way, English was perceived as being at the top of the hierarchical order of power for languages and proficiency in it was understood to make learners competitive in global markets.
4.2 Investment in Multilingualism Beyond English

It is worth mentioning that 91% of the participants interviewed for this project stated that they “always” use English in their everyday lives and 9% that they “sometimes” do. In contrast, 6% stated that they “always” make use of their second or third (or even fourth) foreign languages in their everyday lives, 12% that they “sometimes” use them, while 82% of the participants indicated that they “never” use them. Surprisingly however, although the percentage of participants who never use their second or third foreign languages in their everyday lives is particularly high, 70% felt that just knowledge of English is not enough, and that learning foreign languages, in addition to English, is a good and necessary investment. Even more interestingly, 94% indicated that they would like their children to start learning at least two foreign languages (one of them always being English) outside of school at a young age. Cathy, for example, said that after learning English her children “can learn whatever foreign languages they want, since there are no practical applications of second foreign languages in Greece.” Consequently, participants supported multilingualism beyond English, even if it had limited relevance to their everyday lives, and the vast majority of them were willing to invest time and resources to ensure that, like them, their children will possess these skills. The data on participant foreign language use are summarized in Chart 6, and the data on participant attitudes towards multilingualism beyond English in Charts 7 and 8 below.
Chart 6: Foreign language use

Percentage of language use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Languages</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second, third, fourth foreign languages</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 7: Is Knowledge of English as a Foreign Language Enough?

- Yes: 30%
- No: 70%
Investment in multilingualism beyond English was primarily justified on the grounds that knowledge of English is a “given,” “taken for granted,” or that it is “too common” as a skill. As Cathy explained, “English was a standard choice, a must, the starting point in foreign language learning” in Greece, and as it was indicated above, many participants, like Katerina, even went as far as to say that “[Greeks] don’t even consider learning English as learning a second language.” However, participants expressed the view that this was not always the case; as Miriam explained, “in the past knowing English was considered the highest achievement,” even though, as she elaborates, this is not true anymore in Greece. Along the same lines, Sal noted that in the past, “learning one language was a big deal; nowadays learning two is more important and learning three even more. Today knowing at least two foreign languages is absolutely necessary, just knowing one is nothing.” Sal concluded that “individuals learn more languages as extra
qualifications. Nowadays in Greece English is not enough, it is taken for granted by most people. Knowing English is like knowing Greek: [you know English] so what?” Throughout the data, English emerged as a staple of cultural capital, a skill as basic as literacy in one’s mother tongue or digital literacy, rather than a foreign language that would be considered to enrich the individual’s linguistic capital.

Tourism was one of the sectors for which participants stressed the value of multilingualism beyond English. According to Prodromou (1988), since 1984, when Greece became a full member of the European Economic Community (which was absorbed by the wider EU framework in 2009), there has been increased integration with Western industry and commerce, which has also contributed to the creation of a sophisticated Greek tourist industry and created the demand for more language learning. The ability to address visitors in their mother tongue, and not just in the language of international communication, was one more reason to invest in multilingualism beyond English. However, this was not desirable only for professional purposes. Ability to speak several languages and to address a “foreigner” in their mother tongue was understood to be linked to the welcoming nature of Greeks as a nation, since as Anni noted, language learning is “a part of [Greek] culture and it has to do with hospitality. We like to use foreign languages to make other people feel more comfortable.” Therefore, multilingualism beyond English allowed learners to claim desirable personal, professional and national identities.

Multilingualism beyond English was primarily associated with increased prospects of employment and was perceived to open up professional opportunities. As Silvia pointed out, “[Greeks] learn more foreign languages to have more chances to find a job” since multilingualism was understood to enhance one’s qualifications by helping them stand out
among candidates, thus making them competitive in the job market. For the public sector in particular, certification in several foreign languages can translate to points for the candidate which will either help them secure a position, increase their salary, or contribute to achieving tenure status. As Kassie explained, this is the main reason Greeks pursue multilingualism beyond English, “even though practically it will not be useful to them,” referring to the applicability of this knowledge in their everyday lives. According to Theo, “knowledge of English is the least someone can do nowadays. If someone wants to get hired in the public sector, knowledge of foreign languages gives points […]”. This foreign language knowledge requirement is like an extra qualification threshold that the government has placed, even though people might never use the languages they have learned.” Foreign language knowledge as gatekeeping was another prominent theme, with participants stating that in the professional field this was the primary purpose the extra language knowledge was serving.

While discussing the gatekeeping purposes multilingualism beyond English served in the Greek labor market, participants also focused on the role of language certificates. Silvia, for example, explained that it is very common in Greece to “learn languages only to get the certificate to be able to be appointed in the public sector.” Paul indicated that when he was a child in the 90s, his parents like Greek parents now, “are stuck in the mentality of the past that their children can get a job in the public sector which will give them a secure and stable life. To achieve this, they must have certificates; this includes their university degree and certificates in foreign languages.” He characterized this hunt for language certificates to secure a position in the public sector as an “illusion” and a “mentality of the past” because during the years preceding the economic depression of 2009, and especially after the onset of the crisis, there were massive firings of public sector employees and hiring was frozen for several years, severely limiting
opportunities for Greeks to be employed in the public sector. Nevertheless, as Paul correctly pointed out, this did not seem to affect attitudes towards certification, which, then and now, is considered essential to find employment in the public sector. Similarly, Apollo explained that his parents, influenced by what was the social trend in Greece at the time, urged him and his sister to get several certificates in two foreign languages since “chances to be hired increased if [you] had a foreign language certificate. Back then they believed that everyone had to work for the public sector because it was offering more professional stability. The public sector was asking for foreign language knowledge, so they tried to make sure we had as many qualifications as possible from a very young age.” Emphasis was once again placed on the agency of parents, who tried to ensure their children would have a prosperous future by urging them to amass as many certificates as possible to overcome gatekeeping when searching for employment.

Participants indicated that foreign language knowledge beyond English, and especially certification in it, is essential to stand out among candidates in the private sector too. Foreign language knowledge and certification, once again, was described as a form of gatekeeping. Kassie explained that “there are so many candidates available with so many qualifications, [employers] will choose the ones who have the most. Maybe if there were more jobs and unemployment wasn't as high, the standards would be lower too. However, since there are so many willing to obtain as many qualifications as possible, [employers] choose the one who has the most skills, not because they will be useful to them in their job.” In this way, foreign language knowledge was described as a means for employers to sort through candidates, a form of gatekeeping to keep away those with fewer skills, even if the extra language skills have nothing to do with the job in question. As Annetta indicated, “the only way to find the best candidate is to ask for more qualifications, even if English is enough for the job.”
Hence, foreign language knowledge beyond English and certification was described as essential in building a “strong CV” that would allow the learner to find a job more easily by being competitive in the modern labor market. John, for example, pointed out that he went through the process of acquiring multiple certificates that might be useful to him for a job, since as a young child he was told that certificates were necessary “to be able to find a job in the future, to have more qualifications, to cite them on your CV.” And although as Jack pointed out, “not all people getting certificates in Greece have some use for them,” as Georgia explained, “just for the sake of citing the knowledge of these languages on your CV, which is the most faceless document, the first impression that you give to an employer, you could not call [certificates] useless;” even if they are never practically useful to the individual. In this way, most participants admitted that their certificates were of limited practical use to them, like Annetta, who pointed out that “practically, they didn't help me at all; they were only useful, as an extra qualification.” Nevertheless, they firmly believed that language certificates were an integral part of the language learning process, and an essential part of the individual’s cultural capital.

The commodification of foreign language learning, and in particular the importance of objectified cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) in the form of language certificates, was a recurring theme throughout the data. Most participants had obtained at least one certificate in one foreign language and were familiar with the different types of certificates available. Several interviewees commented on the plethora of certificates offered and what this means for language learning in Greece. For instance, Cathy noted that “the fact that there are so many certificates [that test the same language proficiency levels and skills] means that it is a lucrative business.” Participants were aware of the effect this phenomenon had on language learning, with several pointing out that emphasis in modern Greek FLE is not on knowledge, but on certification, or as Athena put
it, there is this attitude that “the certificate is more important than the actual knowledge.”

Similarly, Jessica explained that “Greeks are hunters of certificates. So maybe the majority has associated language learning with that.” This focus on certification inevitably links foreign language learning to private FLIs, where the curriculum is a matter of teaching to the test and its primary aim is to prepare learners for the certificate exams. Many participants pointed out that this approach to language learning is very restricted and exam oriented, like Cathy, who explained that foreign language learning in Greece “has been associated with collecting as many certificates as possible.” In this way, although participants commented on the commodified nature of modern FLE through language certificates and the negative effect it has on the learning process, at the same time they acknowledged that certification is an indispensable part of language learning in Greece, with all of them equating learning or knowing a foreign language with obtaining a certificate in it.

Obtaining certificates in several foreign languages was not deemed necessary only for their potential usefulness in the labor market. According to Jeremy, certification in multiple foreign languages “gives prestige to the individual.” Many participants indicated that just “knowing” a language in Greece is not enough; that it is not considered an achievement. As Maria explained, language certificates are perceived as “proof of one’s effort to learn a language,” and therefore validate the entire process. Certification was also perceived as a source of pride for learners like James, who when discussing going through the certification process for several languages as a child, stated that “back then, you were proud because you got a certificate and not because you learned a language. […] When I obtained the certificate it felt nice, I wasn't fully aware of the usefulness of the language.” Thus, participants made it very clear that certification in Greece is an integral part of language learning in terms of identity too; Jeremy
pointed out that “it is different to know many languages and to have certificates in many languages. […] We love acquiring certificates. Acquiring a certificate, a diploma, a degree, or some kind of accreditation, attracts admiration. Don’t you hear how nice it sounds? They are nice words!” Sara, who works as a foreign language instructor, also pointed out that parents, and society in general, pressure children to obtain multiple certificates, because if they do not they are stigmatized by being considered “failures. They are thought of as not being good learners.” In this way, although the primary reasons cited for acquiring certificates were related to the labor market, throughout the data certification was strongly connected to prestige and learner identity.

Furthermore, multilingualism beyond English, and not just certification, was characterized as essential because it was understood to open professional and academic doors outside Greece. Although only 19% of the participants used their second, third of fourth foreign languages for professional or academic purposes, employment in multinational companies, studying abroad, or the prospect of migration were commonly cited as reasons justifying learning other languages. Germany and France were among the most common destinations mentioned. As Sara pointed out, “[Greeks] always migrated to other countries due to the economic and political situation here. Therefore, we had to learn foreign languages. This is in our DNA, the belief that in order to evolve as an individual, ascend socially, and leave the country to find a better life, you have to know foreign languages.” Given the adverse political and economic circumstances that regularly led Greeks to migrate during the twentieth century, the economic opportunity represented by France and Germany was an incentive to learn their languages. Thus, the prospect of studying or working in these major European countries at some point was provided as an important reason for studying one, or both of their languages at a private FLI, although none of the participants ever migrated, or had plans to do so when learning the language(s) as a child, or
adult. However, according to Jeremy, from the mid-1990s until the early 2000s Greeks felt that learning German or French “could guarantee a better future” and therefore were willing to invest in them. The data for language use for academic and professional purposes as reported by the participants are summarized in Chart 9 below.

Even though foreign language knowledge beyond English was often associated with obtaining certification just to have “an extra qualification to be chosen for a job,” participants also stressed the importance of foreign language knowledge in terms of personal cultivation. According to Maria, the belief that “the more you know the better” is instilled from one generation to the next, along with the urge to amass as many qualifications as possible because “knowledge is power.” Similarly, James pointed out that “since knowledge is power, learning
and perfecting knowledge of foreign languages, to the best of your abilities, opens new horizons. First, it helps you evolve as an individual. Second, it helps you develop your critical thinking skills, by allowing you to expose yourself to other peoples.” Associating multilingualism beyond English with “broadening one’s horizons,” “evolving as an individual,” and becoming more “creative” through contact with different languages and cultures were prominent themes that emerged throughout the data. Additionally, participants indicated that cultivating one’s self through language learning was a sign of “personal growth.” As Georgia described it, it was a means to become more “complete” as a person, since as Theo explained, “for someone to be ‘complete’ they will have to know other languages and come in contact with other cultures.” Thus, the pursuit of knowledge through multilingualism was depicted as a tradition passing across generations of Greeks that defined learner identity.

Participants also indicated that cultivating one’s self through language learning was a means to “gain some societal prestige,” as Paul pointed out, or admiration. According to Stella, “[Greeks] consider foreign language knowledge an important asset that is greatly appreciated. We say, ‘that person knows many languages!’ You think that people speaking many languages are ambassadors of the cultures of all the languages they speak, so there are many things you can learn from them. You see these people differently, you admire them.” Throughout the data, multilingualism beyond English was described as a means to accrue societal appreciation or approval. As Annetta explained, “even though many learn foreign languages and it is something common [in Greece], foreign language learning can make a positive contribution to how we see someone. No matter why someone chooses to learn languages, as soon as we find out that they speak many foreign languages, automatically in our minds they are perceived as a smart person, we think more highly of them.” Additionally, multilingualism was perceived as a means to
compete for societal prestige. According to Stella, learning multiple foreign languages when she was young “also had to do with the competition that existed within Greek society. People saw what their neighbors were doing and wanted to do the same, or even better.” Thus, multilingualism beyond English was also desirable in terms of the symbolic rewards it provided on a personal and societal level.

Proficiency in multiple languages was also portrayed as a sign of “intellectual curiosity,” or as Theo described it, an indication of “an active person who likes learning and seeks to know new things.” Also, knowledge of multiple foreign languages was perceived as proof of “intellectual prowess.” Joanna, a foreign language instructor, explained that in Greece, “the better you do at learning foreign languages, the smarter [people think] you are. […] This is a prevalent belief.” Similarly, Apollo indicated that “if someone knows five languages, they are very smart and very capable. [Greeks] would think that [someone] knowing English, German, French and Spanish is educated and smart.” Learning several foreign languages was also considered a means to hone one’s intellectual skills. Stavros noted that “besides being a tool that can be useful for your professional and everyday life and everywhere in general, [multilingualism] is a way to increase your intelligence and general perception abilities.”

Seeking foreign language knowledge beyond English was perceived as an indication that the individual was not “complacent” and did not just strive for the minimum number of qualifications but was making the most of their time and resources to better themselves or become more “complete” on a personal and professional level.

Moreover, throughout the interviews multilingualism beyond English also emerged as a “rite of passage” that created a shared social and national identity among the learners. The indirect imposition of foreign language learning in private FLIs through the introduction of
foreign languages as compulsory subjects in public school and the popularity of certificates in the labor market made participants feel multilingualism was a rite of passage they had little choice but to go through, like many of their peers. As Jack explained, “my parents were typical middleclass people of the 1980s. At that point in time, and within that social class, it was considered necessary to send your children to learn foreign languages. Similarly, it was thought necessary that the child would be accepted to the university and get a degree, along with other certificates. It was what was socially acceptable, what they should do.” Along the same lines, other participants, like Fanis, explained that they ended up learning multiple foreign languages “because everyone else was doing it.” Emphasis was placed on how foreign language learning “is a part of the general culture [in Greece],” and an important part of the individual’s education as it is a process that “involves meeting people who have the same goals as you,” making friends and sharing similar experiences, as Stella pointed out.

Multilingualism beyond English was also perceived to transform learners into “citizens of the world,” opening them up to new possibilities, professionally, personally, or socially. Since knowledge of English was considered a basic skill, knowledge of more foreign languages would make the individual a more desirable candidate in the labor market, as they would be able to fill positions that requested more specialized language skills than just fluency in the language of international communication. As Sara explained, knowledge of multiple foreign languages transforms individuals into “more flexible employees. An employee who knows many foreign languages has the ability to go outside Greece if they want to compete for other positions; the job market for them is more expansive and not limited by the confines of Greece. […] Knowing many languages makes you a citizen of the world, not of one country, you are open to more possibilities.”
Knowledge of multiple languages was also perceived as a means to enrich the individual’s world view. Contact with English-speaking cultures through entertainment and popular culture was viewed as more mundane and familiar due to over-exposure; in contrast, knowledge of other foreign languages was understood to expand the horizons of the individual and their understanding of the world. Joanna pointed out that “these past years the notion of multiculturalism has gained importance and people value the need to stop being narrow minded, as Greeks have been all these years. Language learning broadens the way you think and opens new horizons.” The notion of broadening one’s thinking through learning multiple languages was prominent throughout the data. Joanna said that picking up French after learning English “opened my eyes” since “the language learning process woke me up; it helped me realize that the world is not only what she can see around me.” Thus, foreign language learning was perceived as a means to reach beyond the borders of Greece; many participants even indicated that it is not necessary to go outside your country to meet different cultures, since, as Chris explained, “learning foreign languages is a way to travel without traveling.”

Finally, multilingualism beyond English was also associated with compensation for perceived shortcomings at an international and local social level. Several participants thought that Greeks felt “inferior” or “disadvantaged” because of the political position of Greece at an international level and the low communicative value of Greek internationally, and knowledge of multiple languages was a means to compensate for it. For instance, according to Eli, Greeks have “an inferiority complex we try to overcome by learning foreign languages.” […] Especially during this time of crisis […] Greeks don't feel European, and they try to overcome the inferiority they feel this way.” Multilingualism beyond English was also associated with compensation at a societal level. Luka for example, said that learning multiple foreign languages
gives a “higher status” to the individual. Paul explained that parents who worked menial jobs, or individuals who come from the lower class, want their children, or they themselves, to obtain a rich skill set “so they are associated with higher classes or manage to ascend in the social ladder. They are under the impression that this way they or their child can become someone. Language learning is a way to achieve this.” In this way, multilingualism beyond English was linked with national identity, class, personal and professional aspirations.

4.3 Discussion

To examine Greek FLL investment in multiple foreign languages and how it is affected by symbolic value in the context of modern commodified FLE, it is first necessary to comprehend FLL investment in English and the ideologies that influence it. As the data indicated, participants perceived and treated English as a “second” rather than a foreign language. Therefore, due to its special status English needs to be examined separately from the other languages discussed by the interviewees as the first step to better comprehend Greek FLL commitment to multilingualism. The data show that discourses of globalization construct participants’ conceptions of value pertaining to their mother tongue and English, as well as their understandings of literacy and what skills will increase the worth of their capital in modern labor markets. Learners’ affiliations with (imagined) national and transnational communities, as well as expected symbolic gains from language learning, also played an important role in shaping their investment in multilingualism in and beyond English.
Based on the analysis of the themes emerging from the data, learner investment in English was shaped by discourses of globalization. Commitment to learn English was described as self-evident since, unlike Greek, it is the language necessary for what participants deemed most essential in this day and age: global participation. The “brand image” of English was associated with global participation since it was described as the language of international communication, global business and commerce, technology, information and entertainment. Therefore, English was seen as absolutely essential for the individual’s capital and was equated with digital literacy. Like digital literacy in the twenty-first century, it was a skill that was “taken for granted,” since learning the language was described as “compulsory” to be a part of the global community. Additionally, with one of the most prominent themes being that illiteracy was equated with lack of English knowledge, it is evident that participants had a globalized notion of literacy according to which individuals are expected to function in global contexts. Thus, it was perceived as equally crucial to be literate in both global and local contexts. The fact that participants characterized English as the “second” language in Greece, even though it is officially taught as a foreign language in a monolingual nation, makes the ideologies stemming from discourses of globalization that shaped learner investment in English even more salient, blurring the definition of what in our contemporary globalized society can be considered foreign language learning. The ideological assumptions that guided learner commitment to the language appeared to have become common sense, which resulted in English language learning becoming a “practice” that was taken for granted and became a part of the individual’s habitus. In this way, ideology was constructed and maintained through hegemonic consent on behalf of the learners who accepted and reinforced the position of English in Greece, and the repetition of practices through treating English as a “compulsory” part of education.
By providing access to the highly valued global networks, knowledge of English was believed to empower the individual in terms of their economic and symbolic capital. English was understood to open up employment possibilities in global labor markets. Participants also thought that it enabled them to affiliate with an imagined international community of people who could enjoy popular entertainment in the language and have access to more sources of information provided by English-language websites, which as mentioned earlier, make up the majority of websites in the world wide web. English enabled participants to communicate at an international level and claim the identity of “citizens of the world” (Mitsikopoulou, 2007, p. 240). Emphasis was not placed on the social and economic status of the individual which might affect their ability to participate in the global community. As Pennycook (2007) explains, the claims that English is “merely” the language of international communication, “holds out promise of social and economic development to all those who learn it” and is the “language of equal opportunity” is particularly salient today, deluding many learners “through the false promises it holds out for social and material gain,” and excluding “many people by favoring particular people, countries, cultures and forms of knowledge” (p. 100). As the data indicated, English was believed to transcend social and economic disparities that might marginalize individuals and to automatically enable them to claim desired global identities as citizens of the world who could travel, collaborate and work at an international level.

Since the functionality of Greek was confined within the borders of Greece, it was perceived as a language with limited value, a language that was “not powerful” like English. According to Blommaert (2010), the nature of multilingualism in the current political and economic environment has created new and complex markets for linguistic and communicative resources which “naturally include winners and losers,” resulting in many people currently
finding their “linguistic resources to be of very low value in globalized environments” (p. 3). This also appears to be the case with the participants interviewed for this research, as ideologies stemming from discourses of globalization resulted in participants attributing very low value to their mother-tongue, while feeling that it automatically placed them at a disadvantaged position in global environments. Proficiency in English was discussed as a means to overcome international isolation due to the low communication value of Greek, which participants agreed placed the country low in the hierarchical power order of countries. Associating the low communication value of one’s mother tongue to inability to exercise power locally and internationally is a common phenomenon within the EU, since as Loos (2000) indicates, “the less an EU member state’s national language is used, the less linguistic capital will be available for its holders to get access to symbolic power and exert symbolic domination.” Therefore, knowledge of English was empowering learners who felt that their mother tongue was not powerful in and outside the EU.

Furthermore, knowledge of the language was perceived to enrich the individual’s capital domestically. Participants equated knowledge of English to knowledge of one’s mother tongue, as they explained how they had little choice but to commit to learning the language to acquire the basic prerequisite for any professional and academic endeavor in Greece. Knowledge and certification in the language was described as the minimum requirement one could have to apply for graduate or postgraduate studies, or employment in the public and private sectors. As Mitsikopoulou (2007) indicates, there is a “‘progress and development’ discourse” around English in Greece “with a local orientation” since families pay for their children to learn the language in private FLIs from a young age to enrich their portfolio and have more possibilities to find employment domestically (p. 238). Mitsikopoulou (2007) notes that this may be related to
the decision of the Greek state to demand certification of foreign language knowledge for any position in the public sector, whether temporary or permanent, something that was also verified by participants’ answers for this project; employment was listed as the first reason why certification in English (or any foreign language) was desirable. Moreover, participants felt that domestically English empowered them to function fully and independently in all aspects of social life, since as Dendrinos (1999) points out, in Greece there is a “systematic construction of reality whereby, by not knowing English, one is excluded from anything of social importance” (p. 713). English enabled learners to use technology, navigate virtual spaces, and comprehend the jargon used to analyze the current political and economic developments in Greece and internationally, allowing them to assume modern Greek identities. These beliefs index powerful (imagined) identities that helped structure participant investment in the language.

Participants believed English was useful in advancing the speaker’s cultural and social capital, thereby increasing the array of domestic identities they could claim. The interviewees explained that their parents insisted they start studying the language at a private FLI at a young age to have access to more opportunities as adults in the labor market, and because learning the language and acquiring certification in it was an index of success and class aspirations. Lack of knowledge in the language was identified by all participants as a sign of severe financial difficulties, which did not only index that there was no ability to pay for language lessons, but also that the individual would not be able to overcome gatekeeping and achieve professional prosperity and consequently social ascension. Therefore, learning English and acquiring certification in the language emerged as a prerequisite to claim the identity of a middle-class successful professional. Dagenais (2003) examined parents’ investment in language education for their children, explaining that it is a means to enrich their children’s capital and secure their
access in imagined domestic and international communities. Similarly, participants’ parents, influenced by “what everyone did at the time,” insisted that their children learn English at a young age to claim participation in imagined international communities, and middle-class domestic ones. In this way, if, as the data suggest, English is considered such a basic skill and is equated to knowledge of Greek in terms of social and economic importance, then it appears that for the participants, knowledge of English is part of what it currently means to be an educated middle-class Greek.

Moreover, these (imagined) global and domestic identities also reflect and reinforce the symbolic value of English in Greece. As Pennycook (2007) explains, English “like other languages, does not exist as a prior system but is produced and sedimented through acts of identity” (p. 112). As the data analysis indicates, learners perform desired (imagined) global and local identities through English, since it is perceived as the language that makes global participation possible and provides access to everything that is associated with modernity in Greece: technology, the internet, social media and upward social mobility. This process results in social and cultural meanings being ascribed to English, making it a “product of ritualized social performatives” that are “acts of identity, investment and semiotic (re)construction” (Pennycook, 2007, p. 110). Therefore, as Pennycook (2007) notes, “English is neoliberalism, English is globalization, English is human capital” (p. 112), as can also be seen through the participants’ answers who viewed and treated the language as a “product” with fixed attributes that can be “bought” through the language certification process. And even though Pennycook (2007) might be discussing English in terms of its functions in globalization, hegemonic global English was perceived as desired cosmopolitanism by the participants. Participants’ views of the function of English and the qualities it represented in the globalized economy were positive. The qualities
associated with English were perceived to transfer to the learner and not be affected by other social and economic factors that might restrict individuals and form their identities.

Nevertheless, although interviewees were invested in English and stressed the importance of knowing the language for their capital and that of future generations of Greeks, they felt that the skill was gradually losing its social and economic impact. Theories on supply and demand verify their intuitions, as it has been pointed out that “high competence in English will be like basic literacy skills hundred years ago or computer literacy today in the West, a self-evident, necessary basic prerequisite for any job, not just ‘good’ ones, but not sufficient” (Skutnabb-Kangas 2002, p. 17). Similarly, participants described how the “banality” of the skill makes it more difficult to exchange this part of their linguistic capital for economic capital. Therefore, to enrich their cultural and linguistic capital participants (more often than not by decision of their parents) followed what they characterized as a “tradition” passing from one generation of Greeks to the next: they pursued multilingualism in major EU languages.

Participants’ investment in multilingualism beyond English was understood to enrich their capital and multiply the identities they could claim, since English knowledge was perceived as a staple of their cultural capital like literacy in their mother tongue, or digital literacy, rather than a skill that would further advance their capital and make them competitive in labor markets. Although English was a prerequisite to participate in imagined international and local communities, knowledge of additional foreign languages was understood to help participants stand out domestically and internationally in comparison to those who knew only English, thereby increasing possibilities of imagined futures. Knowledge of multiple foreign languages was deemed necessary to overcome gatekeeping in the private and public sectors by helping them stand out among candidates competing for the same position. Therefore, these skills
allowed them to perceive themselves as versatile potential employees who are not just proficient in the language of international communication, but also in the most powerful languages of the EU, making them suitable candidates for a wider array of employment opportunities that required more specialized language skills in Greece and beyond.

Thus, participants were invested in learning and getting certification in other languages beyond English, as it allowed them to claim desirable professional identities and envision a greater variety of imagined futures internationally and domestically. As Early & Norton (2012) explain, “people who have access to a wide range of resources will have access to power and privilege, which will in turn influence how they understand their relationship to the world and their possibilities for the future” (p. 199). Therefore, even though participants’ parents, or the participants themselves, did not have any immediate practical use for the extra language knowledge, they still acquired it since they had access to those resources, in an attempt to accrue more power and privilege in the future. They believed that the imagined futures the extra language knowledge made possible could be attainable if they ever wished to pursue them.

Language learning as central to exercising and accumulating power is also evident through the answers of many participants who identified knowledge with power, justifying in this way foreign language learning beyond English as a resource to increase the value of their capital and social power, even when it was of little practical relevance to their lives.

Furthermore, participants were committed to learning several foreign languages and to certifying this knowledge as they expected it to increase their symbolic capital, even if it did not necessarily increase their economic capital. Based on the data analysis, learning English was the bare minimum someone could do to have a chance to get employment and to be able to participate in all aspects of social life in Greece; certified knowledge of more languages—
especially when children were learning these languages and acquiring certification at a young age and there was no way of knowing if these resources were ever going to be of use—was a form of symbolic consumption undertaken to “affirm one’s status” (Ravasi & Rindova, 2004, p. 3). Participants described their parents as belonging to either lower-middle, or middle class and explained that their investment in the objectified form of cultural capital was a means for them to help their children gain prestige and ascend socially. Amassing a rich skillset was perceived as an attempt to “compensate” for any shortcoming in terms of economic and symbolic capital. Therefore, although participants commented on the negative effects of the commodification of language in modern FLE, they were deeply invested in language learning and certificates as a source of symbolic power which was indexing upward-aspiring class identities.

Even when all the reasons for committing to extra foreign languages were not always clear to the learners, especially when they started studying them as children at the behest of their parents, they were still invested in them because it was a communal process, a shared experience; many of their peers went through it. Throughout the interviews, knowledge of multiple foreign languages emerged as a marker of belonging to a particular social class aspiring for social ascension, as well as a general indicator of social normalcy; a sign that the individual went through the rites of passage that were considered socially acceptable and desired in Greece at that time for the social group they identified with. The characterization of the pursuit of multilingualism as a Greek “tradition” further highlighted the deep relation between identity and foreign language learning and how perceptions of Greek nationhood and European identity influenced investment in acquiring and certifying knowledge in multiple foreign languages. The data show that foreign language learning and certification was inextricably connected to their social identity; in the long run, this process was serving the social, economic and professional
aspirations of their generation and their social class. Prodromou (1988) eloquently described the cultural and social dimensions of foreign language learning in Greece in 1988, and his words are still accurate 30 years later: “[i]n Greece, memories of deprivation in a village with no electricity make manual work a mark of poverty and failure: a foreign language may not open doors to a white-collar job, or a permanent civil service post, but it certainly opens a window on to a better social position” (p. 79). Similarly, participants described foreign language knowledge as an essential part of their capital that, along with their academic qualifications, could enable them to aim higher professionally and socially and redefine their identity. Thus, their desire to increase their capital and establish their affiliation with imagined local communities of like-minded people fueled their investment in multilingualism.

In this way, while participants stressed the importance of acquiring knowledge in multiple languages to be more marketable in the labor market and increase their capital, at the same time they also placed emphasis on the desired identities that extra knowledge would allow them to assume. Knowledge of and certification in multiple foreign languages was described as a prerequisite to identify oneself as a cultivated individual, and for a good reason: according to Phillipson (2003), “since the Age of Enlightenment, proficiency in one or more languages has been associated with perceptions of varying degrees of culture or ‘civilization’” (p. 25). On the official website of the Research Centre for Language Teaching Testing and Assessment (RCeL) of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, which is tasked with advancing research and educational projects of the Greek Ministry of Education and of educational and research institutions in Greece and abroad, it is indicated that the vast majority of Greeks believe that foreign language knowledge is essential, especially if it serves international communication. More importantly, it is noted that today those who do not know foreign languages are considered
uneducated and uncultivated, while those who know foreign languages are thought to have an advantage: they are those who will have more educational and professional opportunities and will quickly be absorbed in the labor market (Socio-economic dimensions of FLE, n.d). In this way, as multilinguals, participants did not just have potentially increased professional opportunities but could also claim the identity of intellectually curious and sharp individuals who held appreciation for multiculturalism because they dedicated time and effort to learn several foreign languages. They were hard-working learners who strove to amass as much knowledge as possible and own certification to prove it. Additionally, proficiency in languages beyond English enabled participants to perceive themselves as hospitable hosts to speakers of other languages who visit Greece—even if they resorted to using English to communicate with them—making it possible for them to claim desirable national identities. Participants’ diverse investments in multilingualism also included their desire to assume the desirable personal and national identities of individuals who did not remain complacent by only learning the language of international communication.

Multilingualism in several languages was also perceived as a prerequisite to be included in the transnational community of individuals who could live, work and study in multiple EU countries if they ever chose to. Although English was understood to transform the learner into a “citizen of the world,” knowledge of multiple EU languages was said to transform the learner into an “upgraded” version of this identity; a citizen of the world who would be able to fully function in major EU countries without relying on the language of international communication. Thus, unlike English, which was portrayed as the language of international communication, French and German for example, which were the next most common foreign language choices, were associated with specific imagined futures. Although commitment to learning these
languages will be discussed in detail in the following chapter in terms of positive symbolic value and how it affects learner investment, the imagined communities and futures to which German and French were perceived to grant access influenced participant investment in multilingualism, even if the practical relevance of this extra language knowledge was limited in their lives.

The learners examined here belonged to the generations who experienced the cultural impact of the educational shift caused by the transition of Greece in the EU through the “imposed” foreign language learning that started from the public school and rapidly expanded in private FLIs. For them, multilingualism in and beyond English was such a popular choice that it was perceived to have gradually become a part of the Greek culture. It allowed learners to claim multiple modern domestic and cosmopolitan identities, as well as desirable personal and national ones, and to feel empowered through knowledge of prestigious, economically and politically powerful languages. Nevertheless, due to the commonality of English as a skill in the domestic and global labor markets, learners believed they needed to enrich their linguistic capital further. Therefore, they invested in powerful and prestigious languages of the EU to be able to assume membership in professional communities and imagined futures in Greece, as well as in multilingual, transnational communities, since immigrating and/or studying abroad was part of the imagined futures of these learners who committed to multilingualism. Thus, investment in language learning indeed proved to be an investment in learner identity (Norton, 2017). Even if the actual foreign language knowledge was of limited practical use, participants committed to several foreign languages to claim modern empowered identities of cultivated, intellectually curious individuals, and to fulfill the aspirations of their social class, which could not be achieved just through knowledge of English.
Identity, ideologies and capital emerged as crucial factors influencing investment in multilingualism in and beyond English. However, as the data indicate, linking different identities, imagined futures, and/or association of imagined communities with different languages played a central role in fueling learner commitment to multilingualism beyond English, even when this extra language knowledge would not directly advance the learner’s economic capital. The symbolic value associated with English resulted in participants describing it as the “universal open sesame” within the context of the global community (Phillipson 2003, p.135). However, to complete the puzzle of their modern international, domestic, and transnational EU identities, participants felt it was necessary to learn languages which would allow them to assume specific qualities through the symbolic value associated with them. Hence, in the chapters that follow I examine how the set of social and cultural meanings associated with foreign languages (symbolic value), enables learners to express or claim different identities and social and status group memberships, consequently shaping their investment in different foreign language options. Acknowledging the intense commodification of modern private FLE which emerged as a decisive factor in shaping participant perceptions of the language learning process, since language was always treated and perceived as a commodity desirable for the symbolic and material gains it can accrue to the learner, I investigate how participants perceived different foreign language choices as “products” with fixed attributes that can be “bought” through the language certification process, and how these attributes were perceived to transfer to the learner, allowing them to link different imagined futures, communities and identities to different languages.
CHAPTER 5

Positive Symbolic Value and Greek Foreign Language Learner Investment

5.1 Positive Symbolic Value and Foreign Languages

As the data analysis has shown so far, within the context of modern private Greek FLE participants perceive and treat languages as commodities that can be “owned” and “consumed” through certification to increase their symbolic, cultural, economic and social capital, pursue imagined futures, claim membership in imagined local and transnational communities, express their identities, and/or adopt new ones. Since, as Bourdieu (1977) explains, all commodities are attributed symbolic value within a given market and sociocultural context, and since the commodification of language plays such an important role in the way participants perceive the foreign language learning process, in this and the following chapters I focus on symbolic value associated with the foreign language choices participants discussed in their interviews. These include languages they learned, languages they would like to learn in the future, and languages they wish their children to learn. The following analysis of the sociocultural meanings associated with each foreign language in Greece aims to provide greater depth to the investigation of FLL investment in multilingualism and more specifically, the distinct identities, imagined futures and communities each language is understood to provide access to, as well as the ways different languages are understood to contribute to the individual’s capital.

In this chapter I explore the language ideologies that are associated with foreign languages attributed positive symbolic value, as well as learner attitudes, which mainly reflect dimensions of language attitudes associated with superiority, namely wealth, prestige,
intelligence, and social attractiveness (Zahn & Hopper, 1985). The languages with the strongest association with positive symbolic value were the most powerful languages of the EU: English, German, and French, followed by the widely spoken Italian and Spanish. In the preceding chapter I discussed investment in English in terms of ideology, identity, capital and how it is influenced by the symbolic value or “brand image” associated with the language, which makes it perceived by Greek learners, as well as globally, as the language of international communication, and as Cameron (2012) notes, “human capital” (p. 112). Therefore, in this chapter I focus on the symbolic value associated with German, French, Italian and Spanish and how it influenced perceptions of distinct identities, imagined futures and communities these languages could provide access to, in an attempt to synthesize a comprehensive picture of participant investment in multilingualism in terms of ideology, identity and capital.

I begin with German, which was the second most popular language learned. Although English was perceived as the language of international communication, global markets, and a staple of the individual’s cultural capital, as discussed in the previous chapter, German was the language most frequently associated with economic and political power. When asked why participants chose to learn it (or why their parents did, in case it was chosen for them), the country’s powerful economy that is based on a developed industrial sector, its central role in the EU, and its perception as a “powerful country” in terms of international politics were the reasons most frequently given. For instance, Michael said that he learned the language because he was influenced by his parents who believed that Germany was a powerful country in the European union with a lot of influence and that is why he should learn it. As Sal pointed out, “German is a language that for [Greeks] is related to economy and politics,” because according to Stavros, “in the international economic stage and in Europe, Germany is a very powerful country.” Hence,
Margie noted that Greeks learn German because it is a powerful language, and she explained that she learned German because as a child she was told that it would be “a useful language for professional purposes in the future. They said that German is the language of the future.” In this way, Greece’s membership in the EU appeared to shape the image of the country and the qualities attributed to its language.

The industrial element associated with the country defined the attributes related to the language: German was described by participants as the language of “technology” and “science,” and participants believed it expressed qualities such as “organization,” “practicality” and “industriousness.” Through referencing the auto and manufacturing industries of Germany, and the contributions the country has made in the field of medicine, participants described the language as suitable for individuals who wish to pursue high-end careers. Jason for instance, explained that German is “mainly learned by those who want to become scientists,” and is not a language someone would learn for everyday use, like English. Also influenced by industry-related associations, German was described as a “practical” language, compared to other foreign language options available in Greece. For example, as Maria pointed out, although she did not have any future plans that involved German or depended on her knowledge of the language, her parents told her that “German would be more useful [compared to other foreign languages], although it is not used by more people around the world; it would be more practical. This is what they believed.” Additionally, Theo pointed out that Greeks associate characteristics they attribute to the German people with the language, like “effective organization,” for example. Maria, along the same lines, noted that “[Greeks] consider the Germans as more hard-working and strict. So maybe this is how they view the language.” When asked if Greeks associate these characteristics with the language, Maria replied, “Yes, and through learning the language you can become more
practical and hard working. But if you think about it, this is not accurate. However, this is probably how [Greeks who learn the language] think.” Thus, by learning German individuals can assume the positive attributes associated with the language which will be transferred to them through the process of language learning.

Furthermore, common themes emerging throughout the data were associating German with wealth, superiority, and prestige. Several participants noted that German is a prestigious language, with Jeremy explaining that learners can benefit from its prestige. He pointed out that “Germany is considered the greatest power in Europe, and although German might be useless to you as a Greek, you will learn it to know the language of the most powerful country in Europe. This is how [Greeks] think.” The prestige of the language was also associated with power, status and authority within the EU; according to Stella, “if you turn on the news you will hear that there is correspondence from Berlin, not from Oslo. Sweden or Portugal, for example, do not play an important role in the developments of the European Union. Therefore, German is considered a powerful language.” Emphasis was not only placed on notions of prestige associated with power, but also wealth; as Margie noted, “Germans are considered superior, [Greeks] have the image of them driving a Mercedes. In general, whatever is northern European is considered good.” The perception of the language as representing a “brand” with fixed qualities and high or positive value was prominent throughout the data, with all participants transferring the qualities perceived to characterize the country to the language, thereby associating it with power, wealth, superiority and prestige.

Along the same lines, French was associated with power and wealth, and was believed, like German, to represent what Apollo described as the “the high Europe, the rich Europe.” Participants indicated that France is a “financial power” in Europe, as Fanis noted, and that in
general, it is a “powerful country,” as Peter explained. Several participants, like Sal, also made a reference to the “glory of the French empire,” which was a testament to the perceived heritage of power and affluence of the country. Consequently, French was thought to be a language symbolizing wealth and political power, as well as what was understood by participants to be “European.” As Joanna pointed out, “[Greeks] have a peculiar connection to France. We view them as Europeans, as rich; they were colonizers and a very strong political power. We think that northern Europe is civilized. They have nice streets and a functional public sector, a functional state. We think that if we approach them, even in terms of language, if we learn their language, we will become like them.” Thus, French was linked to positive symbolic value which stemmed from ethnocentric impressions of the country. Participants felt that language learning enabled them to embody the qualities associated with the language. French was perceived as a language expressing a true European identity as imagined by the participants, characterized by high levels of functionality on the state level, as well as by political power, affluence, and civilization.

While acknowledging the positive symbolic value of French in Greece, most participants pointed out that the language is being gradually “put aside, compared to its popularity in the past,” as Silvia noted. French was the third most popular language learned by the participants; however, the belief that it was losing its appeal as a language choice in Greece was prominent. Participants attributed this phenomenon to the rise of English in the global markets, which “also influences culturally the biggest part of the Western World,” limiting the influence of French, according to Jack. They also attributed the decline in the popularity of French to the rise of Germany as the main political and economic influencer in the EU, which, as Stavros explained, resulted in French falling lower “on the hierarchy of languages people in Greece learn.” However, although many participants, like Jessica, who learned French when she was a child,
pointed out that “French was popular in the past, not anymore,” and there was a clear indication of linguistic devaluation in relation to other major languages of the EU, the data analysis indicated that French was the foreign language most closely associated with notions of prestige, cultivation and high status.

The expressions to “know how to speak French and to play the piano” or “to be raised with French and piano lessons” are broadly known in Greece and widely used—often humorously—to indicate the relationship between the language and notions of cultivation and high status. These expressions were referenced multiple times by almost half of the participants, including those who had not learned the language, in an attempt to elucidate the social and cultural meanings associated with French and its close association with cultivation and elite status. Most participants indicated that during the first half of the 20th century, fluency in French was only attainable by wealthy families with high levels of education, and to a certain extent, these connotations persist today. For example, according to Fanis, French was thought to be spoken “by people who were more educated,” or “by the fireplace of rich houses” as Maria explained, while Sara said that “[i]n the past [Greeks] used to say that whoever is educated and cultivated knows French and how to play the piano. This mentality still remains in Greek society. There is a false association between knowing French and having good manners or knowing how to behave.” The connection between French and social prestige was particularly strong, since multiple participants described learning the language as indexing high status and cultivation.

Throughout the data French was associated with prestige and refinement. Although as previously discussed, the “brand image” of German was mainly shaped and influenced by industry-related attributes, the symbolic value of French was associated with the fine arts and intellectualism. To explain why the language represents these qualities to them, participants
discussed its association with historical events and periods. Stavros, for example, explained that “[m]aybe the French revolution influenced Greek ideology, and there was also the artistic renaissance in Paris, and the revival of the Olympic Games that were influential in perceiving French this way. There was also the influence of France on the Greek monarch’s palace in the 1880s.” All these events contributed to having, as Fanis noted, “a more elevated profile for the French” and consequently their language. Additionally, French was associated with a specific aspect of politics that added to the prestige of the language; it was perceived as the “language of diplomacy,” as Stella pointed out, which made it a significant asset in the context of international politics. Several participants also noted that France was often associated with many high-profile Greek politicians; according to Joanna, “it is not accidental that many Greek politicians were self-exiled in Paris. In our minds Paris is the city of light, the center of fashion. In the past, even for the Greeks who lived abroad, it was considered necessary to know French. It was considered a very big asset.” Hence, she concluded that “this attitude has remained since then; it passes along generations.” Therefore, the appeal of the language in terms of high prestige and intellectual refinement contributes to some Greeks believing that it is “more prestigious to learn French compared to German for example,” as Maria explained.

Although differently perceived in terms of “brand image,” both German and French were described as quintessential “European languages,” representing the main qualities associated with the EU: wealth, power and prestige. As Fanis noted, “Germany and France are the main financial powers in Europe. They have great manufacturing and are widely acknowledged European countries. They have stronger foundations as countries [compared to Greece], and this is how people see them.” Germany and France were perceived by participants as having stronger political and economic foundations in comparison to Greece. In this way, both countries and
their languages were thought to represent positive symbolic value and the qualities of the “true nature” of the EU, which participants believed transferred to the learner through the process of language learning. In addition to German and French, two more languages were associated with positive symbolic value, namely notions of prestige, social status, wealth and power, albeit to a lesser extent: Italian and Spanish. Although eight participants had learned Italian and two Spanish, all of them referred to both of these languages to exemplify the different levels of symbolic value, and the hierarchical order of importance of languages in which it results.

Italian was perceived as a language Greeks were “familiar with” on two levels. Like German and French, participants indicated that Greeks were historically familiar with Italian. For example, Paul noted that Italy is “one of the European countries Greeks interact with in terms of commerce and maybe history. The Germans, Italians and French have left their mark on Greece historically; they occupied or managed parts of Greece in the past.” Thus, Italian was perceived as a foreign language that was also present in Greece throughout history. Nevertheless, unlike German and French, most participants indicated that Italy, its language and culture, were “closer” to the Greeks, adding an affective level to the familiarity associated with the Italian language and its speakers. The popularity of Italian art and cuisine in Greece were frequently mentioned as factors that made the country and its language “familiar;” several participants also pointed out that there is a great degree of fondness towards the Italians because of the perceived cultural similarities between the two countries and explained that Italian is a language that “sounds nice.” Thus, both French and German were perceived as “familiar” historically and in terms of a common membership in the EU, whereas Italian was also described as “familiar” in terms of the culture it represents.
The identification with Italian culture and the assumptions of closeness it entailed in terms of the political situation and living standards between the two countries seemed to decrease the positive symbolic value associated with the language; Italian was perceived as a less prestigious language compared to German and French. Although participants were enthusiastic in professing their attraction to Italian, since, as Fanis noted, Italian has “prevailed in the Greek consciousness as a decent language,” they were hesitant to recognize it as a “prestigious” one. Joanna for instance noted that “Italian is probably prestigious,” while other participants like Maria, explained that she “is not sure if people in Greece think that Italian and Spanish are prestigious languages.” Southern European languages and their countries were often perceived as sharing the same political and economic fate and were consequently associated with lower positive symbolic value in contrast to “Northern European” languages, which were closely associated with prestige, wealth, social status, and power. Therefore, as Cathy pointed out, “Germany and France have always been countries that attracted Greeks. There was admiration towards these countries. In contrast, there isn't a similar attitude towards Spain and Italy. We consider the Italians to be at the same level as we are, we actually say ‘una faccia una razza’” [one face, one people]. Thus, Italian was associated with less positive symbolic value because participants did not believe it was one of the languages that reflected the economic and political standards Greeks were aspiring to.

Consequently, by being less associated with notions of wealth, prestige and status, Italian was perceived as a less powerful language. As Hellen pointed out, “Italy might be close to Greece and many people might learn Italian, but it is not as powerful as French or German; people think it is less important.” In this way, a common theme emerging from the data was associating languages not considered powerful with limited economic importance or usefulness.
Although, as previously noted, participants had limited opportunities to use foreign languages other than English throughout their lives, the professed high positive symbolic value of French and German made them attractive products and little attention was paid to the actual “usefulness” of the languages in the everyday lives of learners. In contrast, since Italian was deemed to have less positive symbolic value, its merits were judged based on its instrumental value; as Margie said, “Italian is a language related to tourism, so if you’re not working in the tourism industry there is no point learning it, I think. I don't say that it is an insignificant language, but it is lower than German; Spanish the same.” Thus, languages were automatically ranked by learners on a continuum of wealth, power, and prestige, with those at the higher end of the continuum, like German and French, being thought of as better investments due to their increased positive symbolic value.

As indicated above, Spanish was frequently discussed in relation to Italian in terms of its symbolic value and its place in the preferences of Greek FLLs. Spanish was identified as one of the most attractive languages for Greeks. Like Italian, Spanish was described as a language that “sounds nice.” Additionally, all participants acknowledged that Spanish is a language that interests Greek learners because “they feel the Spanish close to them in terms of culture,” as Sal explained. The themes of “closeness,” “compatibility,” and “familiarity” between the cultures of Spain and Greece were prominent throughout the data. Furthermore, several participants indicated that Greeks feel a certain degree of camaraderie towards the Spanish, since as Stavros pointed out, “[Greeks] identify with the Spanish people historically, because they went through a dictatorship, civil wars, they have high unemployment rates as we do, and they go through a financial crisis.” Thus, perceived common historical and social experiences were understood to bring the two peoples closer and fuel the attraction Greeks felt for Spanish. Additionally,
appreciation for Spanish music, cinema, and telenovelas from the wider Spanish-speaking world were also identified as responsible for the popularity of the language in Greece.

Regardless of its popularity, Spanish was portrayed as a language that would not make a significant contribution to the individual’s symbolic capital; as Fanis noted “it might be a beautiful language, but in terms of prestige I believe German and French outmatch it.” In terms of affluence, prestige, and power, Spanish was ranked low, since it was seen as the language of a country that was going through similar economic and political turbulence as Greece. For example, according to Stella, “Spanish is not a language that is considered prestigious, Greeks view the Spanish as being at the same level as they are, maybe a bit better off.” Participants did not take into consideration the colonizing past of the country, which was described as a source of prestige and power for France and French. The symbolic value of Spanish appeared to be defined by modern historical, political and economic events and power relations within the EU, which resulted in the language being associated with low prestige, wealth, and political power. Thus, although the high communication value of Spanish was acknowledged by most participants, at the same time it was indicated that French and German were more prestigious and popular language choices, because, as Apollo explained, “the economy of Spain is not in such a good shape due to the economic crisis.”

5.2 Positive Symbolic Value and Investment

The interviews indicate that history, politics, economy and the language attitudes and ideologies they generate influence perceptions of prestige, power, wealth and status that shape
the symbolic value of languages. Although participants mainly discuss their understandings of the value of different language choices based on what languages would be most useful to invest in for greater economic gain, the data analysis reveals that beliefs regarding the economic (and general) value of languages are heavily influenced by the positive symbolic value attributed to them—namely by notions of prestige, power, wealth and status—more than the actual economic benefits they accrue to learners. Therefore, it is important to examine how symbolic value influences learner investment; particularly, how it influences understandings of material and symbolic gains in terms of capital, how it rationalizes consent to established foreign language learning practices, and how it reinforces narratives of imagined futures, identities and communities associated with specific foreign language choices.

Thus, starting with German, the perceived robustness of the country’s economy and its dominance in terms of political power made the language an attractive choice for participants who felt that by learning the language they could benefit from working in a powerful member of the EU. Throughout the data, German was closely associated with desirable imagined futures. For example, Sal pointed out that Germany is “the strongest economy of the European Union. Since Greece is a member of the European Union, German is a language you can definitely learn. Germany has the lowest rates of unemployment, and the highest rates of hiring workers. Traditionally Greeks have migrated to Germany. Someone could take advantage of knowing German for professional reasons.” Similarly, Stella explained that “in the 1950s and 60s, Greeks started going to Germany to work at factories. However, Greeks are not at the level they used to be in the 1950s and 60s. Educated Greeks go abroad and can work at higher ranking positions, not only as workers anymore.” Migrating to Germany for professional reasons was described as a longstanding tradition for Greeks by several participants, who made the important distinction
that today Greek migrants have higher educational levels and can occupy different positions in production; learning German made these futures possible.

In this way, throughout the data, German was closely associated with material gains in terms of individuals’ capital through the professional possibilities it could make possible. At this point, it is worth reminding the reader that, as explained in the previous chapter, German was not used by the participants for migration or professional purposes (except for one who used it with her clients). Out of thirty-three participants in total, thirteen had learned it as a second language, and three as third; out of those sixteen, 70% said they never used the language, 19% that they sometimes did and 7%, that they always did. However, the strong association of the language with positive symbolic value, and more specifically, economic and political power, led participants to label German as a language that can enrich the individual’s economic and cultural capital. German was associated with a narrative of migration that was evolving throughout the years: in the beginning Greeks migrated as unskilled laborers but now they do so as skilled professionals. For example, as Fanis noted, “many professionals from the medical and veterinarian sector migrate to Germany.” This narrative made participants feel that German was a good language choice to invest in, since its “brand image” promised access to imagined futures and advancement of the individual’s capital; as Stavros put it, “by learning German, you can cover more possibilities in the future.” So, even if migrating to Germany was not, or had never been, in the future plans of the participants, the strong association of the language with “more possibilities in the future” made it an appealing language choice.

French was the second language with high positive symbolic value associated with it. Along with German these two languages were perceived as good investments since they were believed to enable learners to advance their cultural capital. Since, as it was analyzed in the
previous section, French was associated with attributes such as cultivation, intellectualism, and refinement, and German with science and technology, participants frequently justified commitment to learning these languages on the grounds of the academic, and consequently professional futures, they could make possible. For example, Stella explained that “Germany has a great tradition in technology and medicine, so even if you don't go there as a worker, you can go there to acquire professional training or for a postgraduate degree at some university in Germany.” Maria also noted that learning French “might be necessary,” since “it makes it possible to pursue a postgraduate degree in France.” Along the same lines, Georgia pointed out that “French and German are official European languages. Someone who wants to do a master’s degree or wants to work abroad will first consider doing it in Europe, and French and German are spoken in several European countries, so they are useful languages to learn to be able to complete a master’s degree or to live in a foreign country.” Although no participants who learned French or German had used their language knowledge to advance their academic studies or receive professional training domestically or abroad, the “brand image” associated with the languages contributed to them being perceived as suitable for these purposes, and consequently good investments.

Furthermore, investment in German and French was desirable in relation to learner identity; specifically, in terms of membership in imagined communities the languages would make possible. As discussed in chapter four, certification in German and French was believed to open the door to a career in the public, private, or tourism sectors, or in multinational companies that requested specialized language skills beyond English. The data show that in addition to advancing learner economic capital, investment in these languages was fueled by notions of affiliation with imagined communities of the target languages. Thus, as Michael explained,
“language learning in Greece is an opening towards the West. We don't learn Turkish, Arabic or Chinese, which could be useful languages for some professions, but we learn English, French and German; we turn towards the powerful countries of the west. It is an opening beyond our borders.” He pointed out that learning French and German started as a means to foster collaboration between Greece and the countries where these languages are spoken, because Greeks hoped there would be collaboration. Along the same lines, Stella pointed out that in terms of choosing what languages to learn in Greece, “[Greeks] always look towards the West and not the East.” Therefore, participants did not only learn German and French to enrich their economic capital by gaining access to imagined futures that involved these countries and/or knowledge of their languages, but also to express their affiliation with imagined communities of “the West” and the qualities they believed they represent, as embodied by the positive symbolic value associated with them.

The data showed that affiliation with imagined communities of German and French speakers allowed participants to assume European identities, or at least “more European” than the ones they had as Greek citizens. These identities were defined by the attributes associated with French and German, which were perceived to be the most representative languages of the EU, bestowing power, affluence, and prestige on their speakers. Thus, in terms of foreign language learning Apollo said that “[i]n Greece we focus on what is European. We have related the term European with things that are well organized, work properly, with countries that respect their citizens and with citizens that respect their country, with law-abiding citizens, with rules that are followed, and all these ideals that we have in our minds.” Throughout the interviews, the term “European” was not used by participants as a geographic qualifier, but as a political one, indexing the EU and the most powerful and influential countries that belong to it. So, by learning
languages believed to represent the ideals Apollo described, participants did not just affiliate
with what they perceived as well-functioning communities, but also identified with them. Theo
said that “we believe that in these countries their economies or their way of life is more
developed than ours, so deep inside we want to be like them. Learning their languages is a means
to communicate with them and see what they do better to be able to adopt it and improve our
way of life.” Thus, learning languages associated with high positive symbolic value was
perceived as a means to assume European identities defined by the attributes that characterized
these languages like wealth, power, and prestige.

Nevertheless, an important distinction was made by participants who pointed out that the
affiliation with imagined communities of German speakers was desirable not in terms of culture,
but in terms of status, prestige, and power to which the language was believed to give access. In
this way, Kassie explained that in her opinion, Greeks learn German “not because it is a language
or a culture that attracts us; it is because we think German will be useful to us, and not so much
because we feel the Germans are close to us or because the German mentality attracts us; that
isn’t a motive to learn the language.” Similarly, Hellen noted that “we feel far away from the
German culture. We see Germany clearly in terms of a great economic and commercial power,
its culture is not an important factor for us to learn German.” This opinion resonated with most
participants. For example, Sal said “I’m not familiar with [German] culture and civilization, and
I don’t know a lot about their arts and letters, but I believe that for the next twenty-five years
Germany will be a powerful country, so knowing the language will provide professional
opportunities.” At this point, it is also worth mentioning that 50% of the participants who learned
German stated that they “didn’t like it” but learned it anyway. The association of the language
with a “better future” was so strong that participants invested in it even if they did not enjoy the learning process, like the language, or admire the culture.

In contrast, investment in Italian and Spanish was discussed in terms of gaining access to imagined communities of speakers of the languages who were perceived as attractive and culturally close to Greeks. According to Apollo, “Greeks think that the Spanish are closer to them as a culture, they live their lives like they do, they enjoy the Mediterranean weather and they have the Mediterranean temperament like Greeks.” That is why, as Miriam explained, “there is affection towards the Spanish and their language. Greeks find them attractive as a people.” Similarly, investment in Italian was described as being fueled by a desire to create connections with the culture and the speakers of the language. As Joanna noted, “Greeks like the Italians as a people a lot. We like their cuisine. The way I think of it, whoever learns Italian is happy to do it.” Investment in Italian and Spanish was not discussed in terms of necessity, as was the case with German, but in terms of desire.

Nevertheless, since both Italian and Spanish were associated with low positive symbolic value due to the perceived closeness of Italy and Spain to Greek reality and the economic and political difficulties that define it, they were not understood as being a vital part of the individual’s linguistic capital, like German and French. For instance, Silvia pointed out that “languages from the Mediterranean area, like Spanish, Italian or Portuguese, are usually learned for personal or recreational reasons. People in Greece are attracted to Spain or Latin American countries and want to visit them and also learn their languages.” Along the same lines, Stavros explained that “you mostly learn Spanish for a hobby,” which agrees with what participants who learned Spanish or Italian as a foreign language indicated, namely that they learned these languages as a “pastime” or a “hobby.” Thus, participants indicated that these languages are
usually learned by adults, and not children who need to build their cultural capital to achieve professional and educational success in the future. As Hellen said, “it is very rare for children to start learning Spanish or Italian. I personally don't know any children studying Spanish or Italian. It is common for adults to study these languages after French and German.” Hence, Stella, who was working as a language instructor for Italian and Spanish, pointed out that she teaches languages “which are considered to be luxury languages. Someone who has already learned the obligatory, necessary languages that will allow them to complete their list of qualification, like English, French and German, might set aside some money and ponder learning Italian or Spanish.” In this way, learning German and French was deemed essential for the individuals’ capital due to the high positive symbolic value associated with these languages and the imagined futures and identities they could make possible. Learning Italian and Spanish was thought of as secondary, due to the limited wealth, prestige, status and power associated with them, although they were still attractive choices associated with the “West.”

The symbolic resources learners expected to gain from learning languages with high positive symbolic value also played a decisive role in influencing their commitment to different foreign language learning choices. According to Luka, “in terms of status and prestige and whether a person will be considered cultivated, the specific languages one speaks play a very big role.” He pointed out that in terms of foreign language learning, “Greeks will be positively predisposed towards someone who knows European languages,” referring to major powerful and prestigious languages of the EU and not to languages of the continent in general. Luka said that “even subconsciously that person will be thought to be at a higher level than others who speak non-European languages.” He went on to explain that Greeks “appreciate the superpowers of Europe more.” Along the same lines, Annetta noted that Greeks “are drawn to power and
prestige; we want to learn a language that is very strong.” Moreover, participants indicated that learning “difficult” foreign languages like French and German would give more prestige to the individual than learning “easy” foreign languages like Spanish and Italian. Thus, learning “difficult” foreign languages associated with high positive symbolic value was understood to elevate the status of the individual by increasing their symbolic capital.

As the data show, assumptions regarding the superiority of some languages reinforced ideologies that privilege certain foreign language choices. According to Eli, Greeks “have some stereotypes in their minds and think that some people are superior to others.” The notion of superiority emerged as a crucial factor in terms of FLL investment since as Maria explained, Greeks “only learn languages we consider superior to ours, or want to learn the languages of people who are ‘better’ than us.” In terms of what makes a people “better,” or what makes a language “superior” to others, Margie noted that Greeks “consider whoever is more affluent to be better than them,” and, similarly, Miriam pointed out that “when Greeks have to go to countries either for tourism or for job hunting, they think that these countries have value and so do their languages.” Thus, as previously discussed, since certain languages were associated with wealth, prestige and status, they were automatically perceived as having inherent linguistic capital and were therefore considered a good investment. For instance, according to Luka, as far as German is concerned, people in Greece “learn it because Germany is a powerful European country and German is worth learning.” Consequently, according to Maria, “parents [of young children] are willing to pay for the languages that are considered superior. Maybe this is why they are willing to pay for French and German. […] Parents will only invest in a language that is considered superior. They will invest in the language and the people that are considered more
prestigious.” Notions of superiority and prestige rather than actual economic benefits from having learned a foreign language were frequently given primacy in terms of investment.

Associating French and German, the two most popular language choices after English, with a foreign language trend or tradition that was influenced by the high positive symbolic value associated with the languages, was a common theme throughout the data. For example, James said that “it is a trend to learn languages of countries that are in a better state than our country or compared to other countries. Parents might choose what languages their children will learn based on how popular they are.” The popularity of French and German was discussed in terms of “tried and true” language choices; according to Jeremy, “Greeks are not focusing on the practicality of knowledge but tend to prefer the kind of knowledge that is considered trendy and well-established. We act according to what previous generations did.” Thus, the “brand image” of the languages, which was associated with high positive symbolic value, made learners perceive them as good and trustworthy investments; according to Stella opting for French or German is “what Greeks have been inculcated to do. All these years these are the languages everyone learns, this is how they get by, so this is why people decide to make the safe choice,” that is, to invest in these languages. Therefore, as Fanis noted, “it is possible French and German have prevailed due to their popularity in the past. […] In the past it was thought that they were the languages you should be taught as second, and I think this functioned as a chain reaction until today.” This resulted in a “tendency in language learning that influences Greeks,” according to Paul, who explained that “in the same way people are influenced in fashion and product purchases, there is a social fashion in language learning.”

Although all participants were aware of this “social fashion” that defined foreign language learning in Greece and the ideologies that shaped it, some questioned the underlying
premise, namely that languages associated with high positive symbolic value have inherent linguistic capital and are therefore good investments. According to Stella, “French is a silly tradition that exists in Greece since being a Francophile used to be in fashion internationally. Since then it has remained as a traditional language choice in Greece. Other than that,” she added, “I think it does not provide anything to the learner.” Several participants indicated that although French and German were associated with notions of power, wealth, prestige and status, they did not increase their economic and symbolic capital to the extent they expected they would. James for example, said that “French hasn’t been useful to me up to this point; it did not really help me with anything,” and Athena characterized learning German when she was a child as “a waste of money.” Thus, although there was a clear perception of the high positive symbolic value associated with certain languages and the ways they were expected to enrich the capital of individuals, at the same time several learners indicated that the promise of their “brand image” did not come to fruition.

5.3 Discussion

The interviews indicate that the symbolic value of languages functioned as a “brand” that represented a set of qualities associated with each foreign language, and they were usually not perceived as overlapping. Therefore, each language was thought of as contributing to the learner’s capital in a particular manner, and certain languages were deemed more appropriate for certain purposes and learners. Investing in prestigious languages was deemed essential in amassing and exercising symbolic power both locally and internationally. Learning languages
with high positive symbolic value that were perceived to have inherent linguistic capital appeared to be important not only for economic reasons, but also for sociocultural ones. In this way, through the symbolic consumption of foreign languages characterized by high prestige, Greek FLLs not only aimed to advance their economic, cultural and symbolic capital, but also expressed their affiliation to imagined communities of the “West” and defined their identities according the qualities and ideals they believed these communities stood for.

As Giles & Niedzielski (1998) point out, judgments about languages are connected to and influenced by our social and national identities. Consequently, the symbolic value of the languages learners learned or wished to learn was shaped both by the shared history of the target language country and Greece, and ethnocentric perceptions of its economic and political power and status and of the imagined attributes of its native speakers. For instance, the symbolic value of German was influenced by narratives of migration and the industrial aspect of the country’s economy, as well as by the central role the country plays in the EU. According to Phillipson (2007), “the EU is essentially a Franco-German project,” because France and Germany were founding member states and “continue to occupy the political high ground in shaping the integration of Europe” (p. 126). Thus, participants, even those who did not learn German as a foreign language, associated the language with prestige, affluence, power and status, regardless of the actual economic gains or practical relevance of the language in their everyday lives. German was perceived as a language that would make possible imagined futures that would increase the learner’s economic, cultural and symbolic capital. Thus, due to its close association with imagined futures linked to economic advancement, German was perceived as a “practical” language. These imagined futures included migrating to the country as a skilled worker,
advancing one’s studies, or receiving advanced training in professions linked to technology and sciences, which were described as areas of German expertise.

Similarly, the central role of French in international and EU politics, as well as the association of the language with arts and letters, shaped the symbolic value attributed to it. According to Phillipson (2003), before the First World War, “French served as an elite link language. It was spoken at courts from Spain to Russia. It was unchallenged as the language of ‘unity’ of a continent plagued by dynastic rivalries, wars and domestic uprisings, and competition over territory, colonies, and markets” (p. 47). As the data analysis indicated, French was perceived as an “elite” language, maybe even more so than German, for which emphasis was placed on economic capital, rather than symbolic. As Oikonomidis (2003) explains, French had a significant presence in Greece before and during the first half of the 20th century; it was “a language of great prestige for the Greeks, in both diplomacy and fashion, but all this changed after the Second World War,” when it was replaced by English. Thus, French was strongly linked to prestige and social status, as indicated by the imagery of “piano lessons” or “a language spoken by the fireplace” that some participants associated with the language. Although foreign language knowledge in general was understood as a marker of sophistication, French was perceived as an index of cultivation and refinement, a language that would enrich the individual’s symbolic capital. French was associated with imagined futures that would advance the individual’s economic and cultural capital, although, due to the “brand image” of the language, more emphasis was put on imagined futures involving advancement of academic studies, rather than migration.

Although French was perceived to have lost some of its value due to the diminishing role of the language in international affairs, it was still regarded as a “good investment” due to the
high positive symbolic value associated with it and the its strong link to prestige and power. Gerhards (2012) points out that “powerful nation states, or rather those which were influential in the past and have left traces of their power behind them, such as the colonial powers, determine the international hierarchy of languages because their position of world hegemony bestowed upon their individual languages a hegemonic position” (p. 54). Thus, although French is no longer the language of diplomacy or fashion in Greece, it is still considered a strong language choice, along with German, due to its historical legacy of political power, affluence and prestige. In this way, linguistic hierarchies that see French as a “stronger” language choice compared to Italian and Spanish are shaped by current economic, political, and social events, like the role of the language in EU, but also by historical events that shaped the current power order of EU nations.

Committing to French and/or German was a means to build a (more) European identity. As Phillipson (2007) explains, “the intensification of contacts between the citizens of EU states involves an ongoing process of ‘building’ and ‘imagining’ Europe, of strengthening European identity as a complement to national identity,” and language learning was portrayed by participants as such a process, that would allow them to cultivate a (more) European identity that would complement their Greek national identity (p. 128). Like German, French was perceived as a language representative of the “EU brand,” which increased the positive symbolic value associated with it. Germany and France were founding members of the EU, and many EU institutions are located in cities where French is widely used, like Brussels, Luxembourg, and Strasbourg (Phillipson, 2003). Thus, France and Germany were associated with what a participant described as the “high Europe,” and all the values participants believed the EU represents, namely wealth, power and prestige. Participant perceptions did not stray too far from
reality, since as Phillipson (2003) explains, the “EU projects itself as a political brand that connotes affluence and political collaboration” (p. 59). Even for participants who had not learned these two languages, French or German were described as the prerequisite to participate in an imagined European community. Learning French and German was perceived as an act of identity, as an “opening to the West,” as one participant described it. Thus, even though the practical use of knowledge of French and German was limited in their everyday lives, participants felt empowered by learning foreign languages that were associated with economic and political power or social prestige, due to the affiliations they could claim through them and the identities they allowed them to assume.

Participant investment in terms of identity and the imagined communities they wished to affiliate with by learning certain languages, highlighted what Norton (2013) described as the “socially and historically constructed relationship of the learners to the target language” (p. 6). As the data analysis showed, through learning German, most participants were not aiming for affiliation with the German culture but with what it represented in the context of the EU, namely power, affluence and prestige. This further illustrates how investment in a foreign language can be nuanced and complicated in terms of identity, since learners can select the communities they wish to have access to by learning a language, rather than embrace the whole cultural “packet” that comes with it. This clarification in terms of affiliation was made for German and not for French, which was perceived as another language high in the linguistic hierarchical power order that provides access to imagined European communities and futures. Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that participants’ stance towards German and their investments in the language in terms of identity were influenced by recent historical, economic and political events that transpired between the two countries, making them want to distance themselves from the
country of origin of the language, but not from what it represented in the European community. The complicated socially and historically constructed relationship between individuals and the languages they learn can also be seen in the case of Spanish. Participants focused more on the current historical and social experiences they perceived Greeks had in common with the Spanish, rather than the colonizing past of the country, as in terms of identity and relations of power these events would not fit their narrative of the imagined community they were affiliating with by learning the language. Recognizing Spain as a colonial power historically, like they did with France, could create a power imbalance rendering participants unable to identify with them as Greeks the way they said they did: as peoples sharing a common economic and political fate as Europe of the South.

Moreover, the fact that participants stressed the importance of learning German and French to affiliate with an imaged European community, although Greece has been a part of the EU since 1981, or that they indicated that foreign language learning in Greece deliberately focuses on languages associated with the “West,” speaks to how they perceive their own positionality as Europeans and as Greeks, and to how they use foreign language learning to shape their national identity and navigate political and historical events. Participants’ discussion of foreign languages and FLE in general led inevitably to explorations of their own identities as modern Geeks and Europeans, which were not inherited but had to be constructed (Giddens, 1991). What languages participants learned appeared to be important in communicating their identity inside and outside the borders of the country. The theme of not feeling “European enough” appeared regularly throughout the interviews, as did the theme of trying to compensate though language learning for some perceived inadequacy caused by the financial and political state of the country presently and in the past, and the power imbalance this creates between
Greece and other EU countries perceived to be higher in the hierarchical power order. Therefore, affiliation and collaboration with imagined communities of the “West” associated with affluence, power, and prestige by learning languages like German and French, which were associated with high positive symbolic value was crucial, since it allowed learners to assume desirable empowered European identities.

As Gerhards (2012) explains, like languages, nation states are part of an international order which attributes different status to each nation state. He explains that “the varying levels of importance between nation states go hand in hand with the varying importance of their languages” (p. 54). In this way, since lower importance was attributed to the role of Spain and Italy in the EU and internationally, their respective languages were perceived to be of less importance by the participants, who nevertheless discussed these languages as popular choices in private Greek FLE. Participants described Spanish and Italian as languages one would learn after they have mastered either French or German, which were considered essential for the individual’s capital. Investment in Spanish and Italian was described as a matter of desire, rather than necessity, which also explains the great emphasis placed on the imagined communities to which the languages would allow access, rather than on how they would advance the individual’s capital. These two languages were described as providing access to European communities of individuals who were “close,” “familiar,” and “compatible” culturally, which implied that the communities to which French and German provided membership were not perceived as close. This “closeness,” however, also implied shared political and economic realities, which resulted in participants characterizing the languages as less prestigious and less useful, overlooking the high communication value of Spanish and its role in international markets, which was overshadowed by the low positive symbolic value associated with it.
In this way, the “brand image” associated with Spanish and Italian influenced understandings regarding their practicality and what learner groups they were most suitable for; Spanish and Italian were treated as languages to be learned mainly by adults, rather than children who need to learn languages with the highest positive symbolic value, like French and German, since those were regarded as better investments. According to Phillipson (2003), “in the linguistic market-place, the appropriate branding of languages is a significant asset, a productive resource that is convertible into power, material and immaterial resources” (p. 23). Prospective learners wish to invest their resources (time and money) on acquiring one or more languages that will help them construct linguistic capital that “is perceived as better investment than others” (Phillipson, 2003, p. 15). Consequently, participants felt that investing in languages with the “appropriate branding,” like French or German, was essential, since they expected them to provide the highest returns in terms of power, material and symbolic resources, even if in reality that was not the case.

Thus, the low positive symbolic value associated with Italian and Spanish meant that learners would gain fewer symbolic resources, like prestige and social status, by investing in these languages. For example, Italian and Spanish were characterized by most participants as “easy languages” and therefore less prestigious compared to French and German, which were described as more demanding and were thereby perceived as elevating the status of the learner who had achieved something “difficult” by learning these languages. According to Bartram (2010), perceptions of language difficulty do not operate only at a linguistic level and are not independent of the learner’s immediate social environment. Thus, since Italian and Spanish were “branded” as “easy” languages in Greece, participants perceived them as such, even if they had never learned them. This contributed to them being associated with lower prestige and fewer
symbolic returns for learners that would invest in them, and consequently contributed to them not being perceived as the “optimal” language learning choice compared to French and German.

While examining the symbolic value associated with different foreign language choices, the hegemonic discourses that influence their ranking in linguistic hierarchies and the ideologies resulting from them inevitably come into focus. According to Gerhards (2012), not all languages are considered equally important, especially when “globalization has increased the competition between languages,” something that is also evident through participant discussion of investing in the “best” foreign languages for maximum gain in terms of capital domestically and internationally (Kramsch, 2014, p. 301). As Phillipson (2003) explains, these linguistic hierarchies “derive from a deep-rooted acceptance of the dominance of a single language within a nation-state, and of a few privileged international languages” (p. 135). The participant narratives indicate that these privileged international languages are English, German and French, which are perceived as superior to all others due to their inherent linguistic capital. Discussions of multilingualism in Europe often seem to turn a blind eye to the obvious dominance of certain languages, which results in the “rationalization of linguistic hierarchies that are considered normal and natural” (Phillipson, 2003, p. 135). As seen from the data analysis, these hierarchies are also internalized and reproduced by FLLs.

Thus, ideological assumptions about the superiority of certain languages guided participant choice and cemented practices which reflected linguistic hierarchies and the position learners felt they occupy in them linguistically. According to Darvin & Norton (2016), “ideologies are constructed by different structures of power and reproduced by both institutional conditions and recursive hegemonic practices” (p. 6). As the data analysis showed, the mandatory instruction of English, French and German in Greek public schools generated
ideological assumptions about the superiority of these languages, and the pursuit of certification that would increase the individual’s capital reaffirmed these assumptions through private FLE practices. Consequently, ideologies were not only reproduced institutionally, but also by learners and their parents, who consented in practices that reaffirmed this hierarchical power order. However, individuals do not always subscribe to ideologies consciously; as Darvin & Norton (2016) explain, this is a process that can happen unconsciously, since ideologies structure habitus and make “particular relations and ideas normative and common sense.” In this way, participants did not necessarily pursue powerful EU languages to further undermine their mother tongue, which was perceived as a language with low communication value and limited power in the context of globalized economy, or their position as Greeks in the EU. They were subscribing to what was described as a language learning tradition that had become the norm for a large part of Greeks for the past almost four decades.

Therefore, by choosing what they perceived as beneficial to their existing or imagined identities, participants, or their parents, invested in certain languages, further reinforcing learning practices that came to be considered normative, or as participants described it, a foreign language learning “tradition” or “trend.” Parents are a significant influence on learner perceptions of foreign languages and foreign language learning in general, so this “tradition” or “trend” was described as being shaped by attitudes that passed from parents to their children (Bartram, 2010). Participants indicated on several occasions that choices they or their parents made in language learning were influenced by broader society; as they put it, they did what “everyone was doing at the time,” since according to Bartram (2010), “social pressure to appear to conform with prevalent group attitudes” plays an important role in language learning (p. 70). Thus, the symbolic value of languages was established and reinforced through learning practices.
transferring across generations. This led to some languages being branded as “superior” to others, or “trustworthy” investments and established language choices, without these values necessarily deriving from the actual benefits the languages bestowed on the learners, but by the de facto “brand image” associated with them through their validation as legitimate language choices throughout the years. Adhering to a certain “brand” of languages associated with specific desired qualities was defining language learning tradition in Greece, as it was believed that the “right kind” of linguistic capital, usually along other academic qualifications, could open many professional, social and educational doors, offering access to economic and social ascension and desired identities.

In this way, investing in certain languages was a form of symbolic consumption which allowed learners, or their parents, to comply with group norms and express their status and group membership, as well as their aspirations for the future. Language learning as a form of symbolic consumption was further underscored by the term “fashion,” which is linked to consumption of more traditional commodities and was frequently used by participants to describe foreign language learning preferences. Moreover, although participants commented on the low returns they received from their investment in their second and third foreign languages in terms of economic capital—except from the one learner who learned Swedish with the intent to live in the country—the symbolic gains they reaped from learning French, German, Italian, or Spanish were indisputable. Regardless the practical applicability of the languages in their everyday lives and the low economic benefit of their investments, participants felt they benefited from learning languages characterized by different degrees of inherent linguistic capital through the positive symbolic value associated with them, which allowed them to affiliate with socially upward-
aspiring domestic groups and European transnational communities, claim imagined futures, and consequently have access to a broader array of identities.
CHAPTER 6
Negative Symbolic Value and Greek Foreign Language Learner Investment

6.1 Negative Symbolic Value and Foreign Languages

As the data indicated, German, French, Italian and Spanish were characterized by different degrees of positive symbolic value, since all languages were more or less associated with the ideals the EU, and by extension the “West,” represented for the participants. While discussing their commitment to the foreign language choices they made, or the reasons why English, German, French, Spanish and Italian attract Greek learners, participants also referred to languages that are currently becoming increasingly popular in Greece. All participants identified the same languages in this category: Chinese and Russian. These foreign languages were portrayed as “antagonists” in the sense that the social and cultural meanings related to them were often the opposite of ones associated with the languages they learned or are popular in Greece; they were languages associated with negative symbolic value. Nevertheless, current economic forces and global capital flows have increased the currency of Chinese and Russian in Greece, influencing perceptions of their usefulness in terms of future economic gains and consequently investment in the languages.

Thus, when participants elaborated on the existing “foreign language trend” that influences language choice in Greece, the discussion inevitably led to these new foreign language additions that were considered along more “traditional” options. No participants had learned either of these languages, except one who had taken two years of Russian as an undergraduate. However, Chinese and Russian were repeatedly mentioned throughout the
interviews by all participants as languages that have gained prominence in Greece, and that future generations of Greeks should learn to gain an advantage in the modern labor market. Given that the participants were educated in an FLE system that was oriented towards the EU and the “West” in general, the analysis of the symbolic value associated with these new additions to private Greek FLE and how it affects potential or future investment in Chinese and Russian for the participants and their children will strengthen my analysis, as it makes possible a more nuanced picture of Greek FLL investment.

A prominent theme that emerged was that the current foreign language trend in Greece appears to be slowly transforming. As previously discussed, participants indicated that the Greek public-school system influenced foreign language choice by placing emphasis on English, French and German. Additionally, they explained that when they were children the language choices available at private FLIs were according to the languages offered at public schools, limiting the language options available. These factors contributed to establishing a “foreign language trend” that lasted almost four decades, a trend which, as participants noted, appears to be changing in terms of language choices that follow after English language acquisition. Thus, referring to the languages currently popular as foreign language choices in addition to English, Ani said that “these languages are getting old,” while Luka explained that with the passing of time “other languages [than French, German, Italian and Spanish] will be considered trendy.” Along the same lines, Miriam said that in terms of language choice “we are in a transitional stage [in Greece],” emphasizing the slowly shifting face of the modern private FLE industry.

Additionally, the role of parents was stressed in shaping the foreign language learning trend for each period. For instance, Jeremy, whose parents had urged him as a child to attend German language lessons, said that, “as far as the secondary language choices are concerned, I
believe this fashion will slowly change. For example, I am not planning to have my child learn German. The previous generation was operating in a different timeline.” Jeremy, like other participants, stressed the fluidity of foreign language tendencies, and how they are subject to transformation with the passing of time, as well as the role of parents in establishing them by insisting on certain language choices for their children. Similarly, Hellen explained that when she was a child her parents “weren't even thinking about other languages beyond German and French as options for foreign language learning. Their mind wouldn't go beyond European languages.” Each generation of parents was understood to be influenced by different economic and political forces that were influencing the languages they chose to invest in for their children.

The reason for this gradual shift was a perceived new economic order and the central role Chinese and Russian were thought to play in it. As Stella put it, these new languages gather momentum because “the economic orientation is changing, people see that the money comes from elsewhere, like Russia, so we need to divert our attention and leave the traditional, safe, standard choices, and look elsewhere.” Russian and Chinese were most commonly discussed as the new additions to the language learning palette of Greeks; Annie explained that “in the past [Greeks] used to learn French and German, but more recently people started learning Chinese and Russian,” while Jason said that “it moved from one generation to the next, to learn three basic languages: English first, and then French and German. For twenty years our parents had this mentality, which they passed on to us. Now I see this gradually changes for the families we will have,” implying that younger generations of Greek parents will opt for different foreign language choices. Similarly, Maria said that the current foreign language learning trend “might change as years go by and tourists from Russia continue to come to Greece. Maybe then people will start learning these languages.” Consequently, the “well-established” foreign language
tradition of the past was understood to be transforming, as new language choices were slowly associated with economic gains.

Chinese was depicted as the language of the “new economy,” and more particularly new investments and international business collaborations in Greece. Several participants spoke of acquaintances who pursued Chinese as adults to gain an advantage in the modern labor market. Annie shared a story of an old acquaintance in college “who was studying Chinese because it had just started becoming trendy [in the early 2000s], and he wanted to have an advantage in relation to the rest of the applicants when he looked for a job. It is not the most common thing to know Chinese in Greece. By knowing Chinese, he had the opportunity to look for a job at a Chinese company that does business with Greece.” Similarly, Sal noted that he currently knows someone “who works in a jewelry boutique in Athens and is getting paid $2000 per month just to talk with Chinese tourists that might enter the shop.” These narratives further cemented the “brand image” of the language as a ticket that would provide access to the new economy locally and at an international level.

Similarly, Russian was described as a “language that has to do with business,” as Hellen noted. Throughout the data, Russian was associated with tourism, more than any other language discussed by the participants. According to Jessica, the presence of Russian is increasing in Greece, as is obvious from the linguistic landscape of highly touristic areas where “you see many signs in Russian in the windows of shops.” Like Jessica, many participants indicated that Russian now appears alongside English more frequently in signage posted in tourist attractions all over Greece. However, Russian was not just described as the language of modern tourism in Greece. Unlike tourists of any other nationality visiting Greece, participants made an important distinction. As Jack pointed out, “Greece has rich tourism from Russia. The people who come to
Greece from Russia are not lower class; either middle or upper-class Russians will come.”

Several participants indicated that this aspect of Russian tourism makes the language stand out as a foreign language choice. Nevertheless, this was not described as a factor that increased notions of prestige associated with Russian, since according to Jack, the perception of the language as that of “rich tourists” did not influence “Greeks’ attitude towards it [in terms of notions of prestige associated with it], but perceptions of its utility.”

Thus, even though Chinese and Russian were depicted as the new foreign language additions in private Greek FLE, participants indicated that they were not associated with notions of prestige. Participants explained that in the past Chinese and Russian were not associated with wealth and power, resulting in the negative symbolic value connected to these languages; as Silvia noted “a few years ago people didn't hold any appreciation for these languages” because of the “status and the economic power of the country where each foreign language originates from.” However, this was expected to gradually change due to recent economic and political developments. For instance, Sara explained that a few years ago, China and Russia were associated with “extreme poverty and lower educational levels; in general, with being underdeveloped,” adding that “only recently has the attitude towards these countries changed. China is a very powerful country in the East. The same is true for Russia.” Similarly, Athena noted that “the way Greeks think about a certain people, they also think about their language. In the past for example when the Russians were impoverished, no one would learn the language, but now that they are doing better financially, people in Greece will learn Russian. It also has to do with the stereotypes that change as time goes by.” In this way, participants indicated that ethnocentric assumptions about the economic and political state of countries influenced notions regarding the value of their languages.
Nevertheless, although Russian and Chinese were described as gradually being characterized by increased economic and political power, they were still not associated with notions of superiority. According to participants, this was due to perceptions of the target language cultures, which were perceived not as “important” or “developed” compared to those represented by the popular EU languages. As Kassie put it, “as cultures and not as economies, [these countries] are less important in our minds. Not because their economies are not as good, because they are actually better than ours. I think it has to do with the beliefs we have about the civilization and culture of each country. To what degree it agrees with us or we admire it.” Stella explained that this attitude is further enhanced by the media, since “we are affected a lot by the media, by the image of the country shown on the television, or the image promoted by the country itself online.” Thus, the projection of the target language cultures and countries influenced notions of prestige associated with the languages. Several participants, like Jason, noted that large countries of the EU are thought of as being more “developed in terms of culture,” referring to the civic freedoms the citizens of these countries were understood to enjoy, a factor that decreased the prestige associated with Russia and China and their respective languages, making them less attractive as foreign language choices.

Another reason that these languages were not associated with notions of prestige was that the improvement in the countries’ economies was not understood to translate to affluence for their citizens and to high living standards in the target language countries. More specifically, as James explained, although Russian and Chinese are understood as powerful languages they are not associated with prestige, since “no one considers Russia and China as places to live.” Thus, according to Stella, Russian in Greece is perceived as “a language with financial power, not as a prestigious language.” She went on to explain that “some languages are identified in Greeks’
minds with their culture, others with their economy, and others with their diplomacy,” and in her opinion, “Russian is exclusively associated with their economy.” In this way, as participants explained, the “brand image” of Russian was perceived to be associated with economic power, but not prestige. Participants expressed the same attitude towards Chinese; although the language was recognized as a significant asset in the new economic world order, prompting some participants, like Annie, to characterize both Chinese and Russian as “languages of the future,” China was not described as a desirable destination for Greeks to migrate, study or live, as the living standards of the country were perceived to be lower than the ones in Greece.

Moreover, a common theme throughout the data was the association of Chinese with “foreignness.” For instance, Chinese was described as an “exotic” language that was “far away” from the Greeks geographically, culturally and linguistically. According to Luka, Greeks and the Chinese “don’t have anything in common culturally,” while Kassie noted that Chinese is a “completely different language. It has to do with the alphabet, the culture, the writing system and the way they express themselves. It also has to do with their way of life, which is something very foreign and exotic to us, something very different, […] it is so foreign to us.” In fact, most participants, like Barbara, commented on the “completely different civilization” and “very different cultural tradition” the language represents. To demonstrate how “foreign” the language is understood to be in Greece, Apollo pointed out the commonly used phrase “it’s all Chinese to me,” which is the Greek equivalent to the phrase “it’s all Greek to me” used in the English-speaking word to indicate something incomprehensible and foreign, concluding that “languages are more foreign when their cultures are more foreign to you.” Chinese was described as a more “foreign” language compared to other foreign language choices in Greece, since as Luka pointed out, “Greeks have a tendency to make a certain hierarchy of languages in their minds. One way
to do that is according to the distance from our own language or from what we are accustomed to. So yes, [Chinese] is more foreign in terms of being more far away or less familiar.” This “foreignness” also made Chinese be perceived as a language choice suitable for older learners.

Although to a lesser extent, Russian was also associated with “foreignness.” As Stella noted, Greeks and Russians share a common religion, which “is also a factor that influences people” in terms of feeling close to a different culture and its respective language. Additionally, Sal indicated that besides the same religion, “many Greek politicians studied in Russia and there are a lot of business transactions between Russia and Cyprus,” which contributed to the language having a historical presence in the country. However, as Sal explained, with the entrance of Greece in the EU “its popularity declined,” which resulted in Russian currently being perceived as “something really foreign to the Greeks,” as Nick noted. Moreover, like Chinese, Russian was also perceived as a difficult language, “a different type of language,” as Jessica explained, compared to the foreign languages commonly learned in Greece. This attitude contributed to treating Russian as an “unfamiliar” language, or a language for “special purposes” that could be learned by learners of specific ages; as Cathy pointed out, unlike with German and French, Greek learners “don't start learning Russian from ten years old, but around eighteen or nineteen; they start learning it as undergraduate students.” Also, like Chinese, Russian was perceived as an unconventional foreign language for Greek FLLs.

Chinese and Russian were described as the languages of the new economic order. The attribute of “emerging economies” which was associated with the target language countries was perceived to characterize the languages as well, influencing and transforming perceptions about their value and shaping their “brand image.” The cultural and social meanings associated with these languages were formed by historical, political and economic events that transpired between
these countries and Greece, or took place at an international level, or by images of these countries projected by the media. Compared to their EU counterparts, these foreign language choices were associated with different degrees of negative symbolic value: until recently they were described as lacking in terms of power, wealth and prestige, and although they were now perceived to be languages of powerful countries and economies, they were still not associated with notions of superiority and prestige. Additionally, their “cultures” were unfavorably compared to those of EU countries, and their perceived linguistic and cultural “foreignness” also contributed to their lack of positive symbolic value. Nevertheless, Chinese and Russian were recognized as important new additions to the foreign language learning repertoire of Greeks and were discussed as potentially shaping future “trends” in private foreign language learning in Greece.

6.2 Negative Symbolic Value and Investment

In this way, the data analysis showed that Chinese and Russian were characterized by different degrees of negative symbolic value, as they were not associated with notions of superiority and prestige. This was not only because in the recent past their countries of origin, and consequently the languages themselves, were not associated with notions of power, wealth and prestige. As participants explained, even if these languages are currently perceived as important agents in the new economic order and their political and economic influence is understood to be increasing, they are still not associated with notions of prestige and superiority due to evaluative judgements regarding the quality of life in their countries of origin and notions
of linguistic and cultural “foreignness” associated with them. Nevertheless, as the data indicate, negative symbolic value did not equate to no intention to invest in these languages. Examining languages associated with negative symbolic value in terms of FLL investment will allow us to gain greater insight into how neoliberal ideologies that characterize the modern globalized economy influence learner investment by increasingly transforming perceptions of language as a cultural artifact connected to identity, to a source of economic profit (Duchêne & Heller, 2012).

As previously mentioned, all participants mentioned Chinese and Russian when discussing new foreign language options that are gaining momentum in Greece, since according to Georgia, learners are influenced by “the existing trend of foreign language learning of each period,” which influences them favorably towards certain language choices. The future foreign language trend was described as more oriented towards international markets compared to the previous one in which the participants were raised, which was more EU oriented; as Annie pointed out, “maybe Greeks will leave European languages behind and move towards languages that cover a bigger market.” The data analysis does not support Annie’s hypothesis, namely that Greek learners are leaving the EU languages behind, but suggests rather that they are attempting to expand their repertoires for greater economic gain. If one aspect of investment in the EU languages previously discussed was advancement of economic capital, investment in Chinese and Russian was exclusively discussed in these terms.

Investing in Chinese was understood to advance the learners’ economic capital by providing access to employment opportunities emerging from recent Chinese investments in Greece. Margie for example, explained that “China is a rising power, it bought a part of [Athens’] Piraeus Port and several other resources in Greece, [so], why not learn Chinese?” Although no participants had found employment due to Chinese investments, narratives of the
importance of the new capital that was invested in Greece and its importance for the Greek economy, especially after almost a decade of economic recession, had shaped the “brand image” of Chinese and influenced the ways learners believed their capital would benefit from learning the language. Hence, Chris pointed out that the “usefulness of Chinese is imposed because of the way the Chinese capital arrives in Greece, they are here as the ‘boss’.” Therefore, learning the language of the capital holders was believed to increase employment opportunities, as opposed to communicating with them in the language of international communication, since as Margie explained, “if they are looking for higher ranking employees to communicate with people in China, they will prefer those speaking Chinese, and not only English.”

Thus, Chinese was the language of business, not only abroad, but also domestically. According to Jack, learning Chinese would be “very useful since the economy of China is slowly flourishing, we can find Chinese products everywhere, and Chinese industries are spreading.” The expansion of China in terms of commerce was stressed by multiple participants, who pointed to it as a factor that increased the usefulness of the language to Greek learners. Annie, who was a store owner and imported most of her products from China, noted along the same lines that “Greeks mainly do business with China and that is why people started learning Chinese now.” Similarly, Margie indicated that “on a global level the economy of China is expanding. Chinese businesses are also infiltrating Greece and new job positions are created, so it is good for professional reasons if someone knows Chinese.” In this way, Chinese was understood to provide access to employment opportunities in new developing markets and was perceived as the language of modern commerce.

Investing in Chinese was perceived to increase the individual’s economic capital because it was a rare skill that was sought after in the modern labor market. For example, Sal noted that
“more people want to learn Chinese now for the same reasons they would like to be trained in a highly sought-after profession. If we see language as a tool to achieve prosperity and a better professional life, Chinese will help them get a job, especially in the current circumstances in Greece. So, Chinese is seen as a qualification that will contribute to professional and economic development.” Because Chinese was perceived as the language of new investments and international business collaborations in Greece, participants believed that learning the language would give an advantage to the learner. Consequently, since “currently there are a lot of economic transactions between Greece and China,” as Barbara explained, “people who can speak the language have an advantage. Knowing Chinese can be very helpful to create job prospects.” Chinese was thought to give an advantage to the learner compared to all the other Greek FLLs who had learned the “common” foreign languages. Thus, some Greeks opt to learn Chinese “to be competitive,” as Fanis noted, since “not many people in Greece know Chinese, and those few that do will be able to find jobs easily.” Chinese was not perceived only as a qualification that would contribute to the individual’s cultural capital to help them get a job; knowledge of the language was equated with employment, due to the scarcity of Greeks who possess this skill and the central role of the language in the “new economy.”

In this way, learning Chinese was understood to help learners secure job prospects in a labor market saturated with overqualified candidates. This is why some participants indicated that there are Greek parents now who consider having their children learn Chinese to better equip them for the future. According to Sara, “a [Greek] parent would want their children to learn Chinese. Their criteria would have to do with economic gain, but in a smarter way compared to the rest who want their children to learn European languages.” Investing in Chinese was often described as a “smart” or “sophisticated” move on behalf of parents who decide to break away
from Greek foreign language learning tradition, as their investment in their children’s language education was expected to be more profitable. Learning Chinese or wanting one’s child to learn it was described as an innovative way to achieve prosperity; as Fanis explained, “people might have found paths [to find employment] they hadn't thought of in the past. People might send their children now to learn languages that are not commonly known in Greece to be able to find a job more easily.” In a labor market that for almost a decade has been decimated by economic recession, knowledge of Chinese was perceived as making learners competitive and increasing their possibilities to find employment domestically.

Russian was also discussed in terms of enriching the individual’s economic capital by securing job positions created by a new wave of tourists arriving in the country. According to Nick, a few years ago “[Greeks] didn’t ever consider learning a language like Russian,” which was viewed, as Annetta explained, as “a rare foreign language.” Now however, it was described as a necessary qualification due to its increased presence in the tourism industry. Chris explained that in places like Crete, which is a popular tourist destination, “knowing Russian is a fundamental qualification” to be employed in the tourism industry, while Miriam also noted that in Corfu as well, “knowing Russian was a prerequisite for many job positions.” Participants unanimously stressed the central role of Russian in the Greek tourism industry, and as with Chinese, knowing the language was linked to securing a much-coveted job position. According to Sara, learning Russian would be “a smarter way” to get “economic profit” compared to those who learn languages of the EU. She pointed out that since “not many people know Russian, and since Russians are investing in Greece now, learning the language would give the individual an advantage compared to those who know the usual, common, foreign languages. This would allow them to be more competitive compared to others.” Along the same lines, Nick, who had
learned English and German, said that “if I were younger and saw that there is this kind of demand for Russian, I would consider it very seriously to start studying the language.” Thus, investing in Russian was a means to find employment in the local labor market by being able to claim newly emerging positions, something that would not be possible with the knowledge of EU languages.

Consequently, investing in Russian was also perceived as a way to be competitive in the modern labor market and stand out among candidates who invested in the same set of EU languages. Georgia, for example, noted that “many people want to learn [Russian] because it is a new language and not many people speak it or have a certificate in it. So, they want to learn the language to be competitive when applying for jobs.” Similarly, Jessica explained that “some people might want to make a difference and break away from established language choices; that is why they choose to learn Russian,” while Annetta pointed out that “the people who want to get ahead learn Russian for sure.” Participants indicated that Greeks choose to learn Russian to be competitive by acquiring a skill that is not saturated in the modern labor market. As Kassie noted, “since many tourists come from Russia and it is difficult to find anyone who can communicate in the language at a good level here, it would be useful to learn it.” In this way, as the data analysis shows, either because it would enable them to claim a job in the emerging Russian-based tourist industry, or because it would help them stand out among candidates, learning Russian was linked to economic capital and increasing one’s profit from investment in the language.

Although investment in Russian and Chinese was discussed almost exclusively in terms of advancement of the learner’s economic capital, knowledge of both languages was also understood to increase the learners symbolic capital. However, this was not due to the positive
symbolic value associated with the languages, as discussed with the EU languages, but because of their perceived complexity and unfamiliarity to Greek FLLs. Participants explained that learning Russian and Chinese is considered an impressive feat; Sara for example, indicated that “there is admiration towards people who learn Chinese and Russian because they are very difficult languages,” while Peter admitted that he “would be impressed by the fact that someone decided to learn either of these languages.” Learning “difficult” languages was perceived as a sign of intellectual prowess, and all participants, especially since they belonged to a generation raised with EU languages, indicated they would be “impressed” or would “admire” any Greek who learned or would learn either of these “unfamiliar” languages.

The pursuit of Chinese or Russian was not only considered a prestigious endeavor because it was perceived as a demanding academic achievement, but also because it was understood to index a “bold” learner who went beyond the common foreign language learning choices in Greece; someone who dared to differ. For example, Miriam said that “I would find knowing these languages more impressive because it goes beyond the usual standards of language learning in Greece. I would ask why that person learned these languages, I would be curious. If someone learns the major EU languages there is no reason to be impressed, they are like everybody else.” However, participants made it clear that the contribution to the individual’s symbolic capital was due to the perception of these languages as “unusual” and “difficult,” and not because they were considered prestigious language choices. As Eli put it, “if someone chooses to learn a difficult language like Chinese or Russian, they will show that they have different interests from all the rest who learn English, French and German, but I wouldn't consider these languages prestigious. It is more rare and special if someone in Greece learns a non-European language.” Thus, learning Chinese or Russian would increase the individual’s
symbolic capital not because of the positive attributes associated with the languages, but because it would index a curious learner who went beyond the foreign language learning norm in Greece.

Even though investing in Russian and Chinese was understood to be important in terms of economic capital, participants indicated that parents do not view these languages as a resource for their children’s capital like they do with the EU languages. According to Silvia, who was a primary school instructor, although she observes that more Greeks currently decide to learn Russian, they are mainly adults, since “Russian will not be the choice of [her] students' parents.” Along the same lines, Chris noted that “mainly older people learn Russian because they needed it for their jobs. Parents would think ‘My child will not learn Russian, let them learn English first, and then we will see.’” Similarly, participants indicated that Chinese was a language one would learn as an adult, not as a child, since as Barbara noted, “it is not common for Greek parents to want their children to learn Chinese.” Russian and Chinese were “branded” as languages to be learned later in life for professional reasons, rather than by children who are building their cultural capital. Annie, for example, noted that both Chinese and Russian are “not languages to be learned by young children,” placing emphasis on the age group of prospective learners thought most suitable for the languages.

Thus, the reason participants believed Greek parents would be hesitant to invest in Chinese or Russian for their children was the conviction that only prestigious languages are essential for children’s capital. As Eli pointed out, “Greeks like showing off and are a bit old-fashioned. We have some stereotypes in our minds and we think that some nations are superior compared to others. Even though there are many business collaborations with Russia, for example, I don't see parents letting their children learn Russian. There is a kind of social hierarchy for foreign languages. People learn European languages more easily.” As previously
discussed, investing in major EU languages played a crucial role in shaping learner domestic and European identities and was linked to social status. Thus, adhering to the foreign language learning tradition of the past was thought to be important for children. Hence, Maria explained that “there are many people who say that Russian is the language of the future, so many people learn the language. But not the children. The mentality that French will be necessary for a child is around for twenty years, the belief that Russian is the language of the future has been around for about five or six years. Maybe we believe that it is more prestigious to learn French.” The longer tradition of French in Greek FLE and the notions of prestige associated with it were cited as reasons that normalized the language as essential for young learners’ capital in comparison to Russian.

Thus, even though Chinese and Russian emerged as important additions to the foreign language learning repertoire of prospective Greek FLLs, they were perceived as more appropriate language choices for adults who had already built their cultural capital and might need extra foreign language knowledge to meet professional needs. Maria further illustrated this point by explaining that “we only learn languages we consider superior,” referring to investment in major EU languages from a young age, which is currently the norm in Greece. She concluded that “Russian and Chinese are languages that started being included in the languages we learn out of necessity, because we realized we need them.” Similarly, when addressing investment in Chinese and Russian for young learners, Luka pointed out that “Greeks want to learn languages they believe are valuable and will also increase their social worth.” This however was not perceived to be the case with Chinese and Russian, due to the negative symbolic value associated with them. Their negative symbolic value limited their appeal to parents in terms of investing in these languages for their children, who were expected to amass qualifications that would result in
symbolic and material gains in the future. Consequently, learning Chinese and Russian was not described by participants as a resource for children’s future, as was the case for major EU languages; instead these languages were seen more as “tools” to meet current demands in the labor market.

Unlike investment in major EU languages, learning Chinese and Russian was not thought to enable the learner to claim desired imagined futures outside Greece, due to the negative symbolic value associated with the target language countries and consequently the languages. Several participants indicated that Russia and China were not countries Greeks aspire to live in. Apollo explained that “Greeks think that you cannot migrate or go for studies to these countries” because, as Kassie pointed out “we believe that their living standards are lower than ours. So, it will not be useful for us to travel or look for a job there. Whereas we think that the EU countries are at a higher level because we admire the way they live, their living standards, so maybe because of that we aim to learn a language of one of these countries.” The narrative of migration or continuing one’s academic studies and professional training abroad in affluent and “more developed” countries appeared to shape investment for younger learners, even if these events never happened in real life. According to Maria, “parents want to think that their children will end up living or studying in a rich and developed country if they ever have to leave Greece.” Since notions of power and wealth that were attributed to the target language countries were not understood to extend to their citizens and to benefit their living conditions, learning Chinese and Russian was not understood to provide access to prosperous imagined futures involving the target language countries, as it was the case with the EU languages.

Furthermore, the perceived unfamiliarity and cultural and geographical distance of these languages, compared to their EU counterparts, also influenced perceptions of imagined futures.
For example, Apollo said “I wouldn't want my children to learn Russian; like all the others I would send my children to learn the usual foreign languages we learn in Greece, French or Italian. I think it would sound strange if I said that I sent my child to learn Russian because it is a country far away from us. I would want my child to learn French because France is close by and it is easier for a child to study there.” All participants discussed the benefits of investing in Chinese and Russian in terms of domestic imagined futures. As seen earlier, those who believed learning either of the languages would increase the learner’s professional options were referring to employment opportunities in the tourism section or in projects created from the investments of these countries in Greece. Even the participants who indicated that they would want their children to learn one of these languages discussed the investment in terms of imagined futures that would unfold in Greece. Michael, for example, noted “If my child wanted to become a mechanic, I would urge them to learn an Asian language like Chinese,” so they could find employment in the projects created through Chinese investments in Greece.

Although Chinese and Russian were described as the languages of the “new economic order” that would be particularly lucrative compared to their EU counterparts, their negative symbolic value limited their appeal and their “trustworthiness” as long-term investments for younger learners whose future options are still open. Therefore, several participants attributed the reluctance of parents to invest in these languages for their children to concerns that Chinese and Russian are a passing fad. For instance, according to Cathy, “parents might be scared [to invest in these languages], thinking that [they] might be a passing fad, while German and French have stable value as second foreign language choices in Greece. They might think that the popularity of other language choices might be passing.” Along the same lines, John explained, “I am not sure if according to today's geopolitical, touristic or economic factors it is a good choice to teach
my child Russian, because in ten years the trend might change, and people might start learning other languages.” Thus, unlike major languages of the EU, which regardless of their practicality to Greek FLLs were perceived and treated as if they were in Greek private foreign language learning to stay, Chinese and Russian did not command the same loyalty, despite being perceived as languages that will advance the learner’s economic capital and being widely available as foreign language choices in Greece for almost a decade.

Another sign that Chinese and Russian were not considered as essential for the capital of young learners despite their description as investments with high economic returns was that knowledge of the languages was not equated with certification, unlike major EU languages. Despite the pivotal role of certificates in terms of the individual’s capital, participants did not indicate that certification in these “new” languages was necessary or expected. For example, Miriam said “If I wanted to obtain a language certificate in a different language, I would choose something more European,” because when it comes to certification, “Greeks are still skeptical, they don't abandon the well-established choices,” as Stella noted. Thus, participants explained that parents are usually willing to invest in certificates only for languages that are considered “well-established” foreign language choices in Greece. Knowledge of Chinese and Russian was understood to be pursued mainly by adults to meet professional needs and it was not necessarily associated with certification.
6.3 Discussion

Although Chinese and Russian were described by participants as languages that were not included in the foreign language learning repertoire of Greeks, this was understood to be slowly changing, with both of them being mentioned alongside the most popular EU foreign language options in Greece. Considering that knowledge of foreign languages is “becoming increasingly desirable for its exchange value” and is seen as a “source of profit in a globalized economy” (Duchêne & Heller, 2012, p. 3), it is understandable that as the economic status of the target language country improves and “it comes to be regarded as an important trading partner within the global economy, its language grows in value within the international language market. Thus, the value profiles of languages … often reflect how they are positioned in global as well as local markets” (Rubdy & Tan, 2008, p. 5). Consequently, the growing influence of Russia and China in global markets and in economic developments currently taking place in Greece resulted in the increase in appeal of their respective languages as foreign language learning options, since according to Rubdy & Tan (2008), the popularity of foreign languages within monolingual national contexts can follow market trends.

Participants discussed all the foreign languages they mentioned, and their mother tongue, in terms of an international linguistic power order that determined the value of each language. They described a well-established power hierarchy of languages which exists in the consciousness of Greek FLLs and corresponds to a power hierarchy of nations, since as Gerhards (2012) asserts, “linguistic order is a parasite on the social order” (p. 54). As Phillipson (2003) notes, international linguistic hierarchies always change with the passing of time, and for the participants Chinese and Russian were perceived to have ascended on the international linguistic
hierarchy due to their increased value in global and local markets and their association with economic profit. These relationships of power informed the social and cultural meanings associated with different foreign languages in Greece, and consequently perceptions of their symbolic value. As the analysis shows, in the continuum of symbolic value, Greeks would be point zero and languages of countries that were not considered more “advanced” in terms of lifestyle were associated with negative symbolic value, even if they were economically and politically more powerful than Greece. Languages associated with positive symbolic value were associated with prestige, wealth and power and thought to have inherent linguistic capital.

Learners considered them essential for their capital regardless of the actual profit they accrued due to the imagined futures and identities they allowed them to claim, whereas languages associated with negative symbolic value had to have a clear correlation to profit to be learned, and even if they did, they were perceived as appropriate investments only for certain reasons.

As mentioned before, no participants had learned Chinese and Russian. The reasons given were that when they were pursuing language learning as children and young adults, Chinese and Russian were not “in fashion,” meaning that they were not commonly learned in Greece since they were not considered to accrue any profit to the learner, and they were not widely available as foreign language choices. Nevertheless, all participants as experienced language learners, prospective parents, or parents of young children who they were going to guide down the path of multilingualism as their parents did with them, had a clear idea about why these languages are currently rising in popularity and are included along the “well-established” foreign language choices in Greece, why Greek FLLs would want to invest in Chinese and Russian, and for what learners these languages are most suitable. As the analysis shows, the economic profits a foreign language will accrue might be the principal reason that
justified learner investment in multilingualism, but it is evident that learner motivations were more complicated. According to the participants, Greeks traditionally invest in languages of those they consider to be “better” than them. Dendrinos (2004b) explains that Greeks learn languages that “are widely used in the world and associated with economic and political power, as well as social prestige” (p. 76). In this way, even if committing and getting certification from a young age in languages associated with positive symbolic value did not eventually benefit the learner by advancing their economic capital, they would still enrich their symbolic and social capital by increasing their status and enabling them to claim a wide array of desired domestic and transnational identities. This, however, was not the case with languages associated with negative symbolic value, like Chinese and Russian, which were not understood to provide the learner with the same symbolic resources that would allow them to assume desired identities and express social and status group memberships.

Thus, unlike their EU counterparts, Chinese and Russian were not perceived as the prerequisite for a wide range of imagined futures, and therefore there were fewer incentives to invest in the languages in terms of identity. Knowledge of Chinese and Russian was believed to provide access to new employment opportunities locally in the tourism industry or the projects resulting from Chinese investments. However, even for domestic imagined futures, these languages were considered necessary to secure a position in the public or private sectors in Greece, although certification in any foreign language would benefit the individual’s CV to serve this purpose, not just in languages of the EU. The perceived difficulty or foreignness of the languages, as well as the long tradition of commodification of EU languages in modern Greek private FLE in the form of certificates, appeared to influence understandings of the purposes for which Chinese and Russian were thought suitable domestically. Additionally, there was no
description of imagined futures including the languages’ countries of origin, which was an integral reason for investing in major EU languages. Proficiency in both languages did not fit the narrative of migration, studying, or training abroad that was intrinsically connected to foreign language learning in Greece and justified multilingualism in several foreign languages that were of almost no practical use domestically. Children were to commit to learning several major EU languages because of the futures they could make possible domestically and abroad and consequently the multiple identities they made available. At this point this was not a narrative connected to Chinese and Russian, which limited the appeal of the languages and the age range of learners for whom they were thought to be more suitable.

As Rubdy & Tan (2008) explain, “language users and learners, like the state, do covertly or overtly ascribe value to each of the languages available to them,” and the data suggest that the value participants ascribed to foreign languages was directly influenced by the Greek state and their identification with the EU (p. 5). The instruction of particular foreign languages in public school, as well as their reinforcement through private FLE and the certification process, normalized certain foreign language choices, regardless of their actual benefits to learners. Although one might think that the increased prospects for economic profit, which would make investing Chinese or Russian more practical and applicable to the learners’ lives, could compensate for their perceived linguistic complexity and cultural foreignness, it appears that participants were more willing to commit to learning an “easier,” more familiar EU language, even if it meant they had fewer chances to make use of it, because of the positive symbolic value associated with it.

Furthermore, the analysis indicates that there are fewer reasons to invest in Russian and Chinese in terms of identity, as they were not considered a prerequisite for acquiring
membership to domestic imagined communities due to the negative symbolic value attributed to them. Despite their connection to profit, neither language was associated with desirable qualities such as modernity, affluence and sophistication which the learner could assume through the process of language learning. The interviews suggested that ethnocentric perceptions about languages and their countries of origin were shaped by political, economic and historical events, as well as by images and stories published in the media, which contributed to the evaluation and subsequent ranking of languages according to their perceived qualities and limitations. In this way, knowledge of the languages was not associated with status and social group membership domestically in the same way knowledge of EU languages was. Although learning a “difficult” foreign language was believed to increase the individual’s symbolic capital, this benefit was not as impactful as the ones made possible by learning major EU languages. Knowledge of German, French, and to a lesser extent Spanish and Italian, allowed participants to express their belonging to an aspiring middle class, index status and prestige, and comply with societal norms by achieving widely accepted touchstones in terms of the individual’s cultural capital, since “choice of which foreign language to learn in part depends on the expectations of what languages others will learn” (De Swaan, 1993, p. 246). In contrast, the negative qualities associated with Chinese and Russian rendered them unsuitable for this type of symbolic consumption.

Furthermore, all participants discussed and justified foreign language learning in terms of amassing and exercising power both domestically and internationally. By acquiring as many qualifications associated with positive symbolic power as possible, participants aimed to secure employment and hopefully membership in the more affluent social classes and to assume identities of cultured and intelligent individuals who successfully completed the educational rites of passage of their generation. Investing in major EU languages also allowed participants to
exercise power beyond Greece by enabling them to assume empowered European identities which, compared to their Greek monolingual ones, were perceived as ranking higher in the international language power hierarchy. Although investing in Chinese and Russian could potentially increase the individual’s power by advancing their economic capital, participants indicated that it would not allow them to assume what they perceived as prestigious and powerful domestic and international identities. Therefore, even though these languages were described as economically and politically powerful, since they were associated with negative symbolic power, it was not the right “brand” of power that would allow learners to assume desired empowered identities.

The negative symbolic value associated with Chinese and Russian appeared to influence Greek FLL investment in terms of identity also because it did not foster affiliation with desired international imagined communities. As Kanno & Norton (2012) argue, “humans are capable of connecting with communities that lie beyond the local and immediate. … [I]nvestment in such imagined communities strongly influences identity construction and engagement in learning,” as was evident from learner investment in major EU languages (p. 247). By committing to several major EU languages as young learners, participants felt they were establishing a connection to communities of other Europeans, reinforcing in that way their own European identity, since as Phillipson (2003) points out, language plays a major role in shaping group loyalty and in marking distance from others (p. 25). This conviction fueled their investment in foreign languages that otherwise had little relevance to their everyday lives. In contrast, the perceived “foreignness” of Chinese and Russian and their respective cultures did not provide fertile ground for creating connections with imagined communities in the target languages. As Kanno & Norton (2012) indicate, the notion of imagined communities allows us to examine the influence of
“globalization and transnationalism on language learning and identity construction;” in the context of this research, it made it possible to comprehend how the conscious orientation of Greek FLLs and the Greek state towards the West, and particularly the EU and what it stands for ideologically, galvanized investment in certain languages and undercut affiliation with imagined foreign language communities that were perceived not to prescribe to these characteristics. This was one more factor that shaped intent to commit to Chinese and Russian, although both languages were described as good investments in terms of economic capital.

Ideology also played an important role in shaping FLL investment, since glorifying major EU languages and stigmatizing other foreign languages options correlated with well-established language hierarchies and the rationalization of foreign language habits in terms of hegemonic power relationships (Phillipson, 2003). This process of glorification was shaped by the symbolic value associated with the languages which elevated perceptions of EU language-related aspects, like the cultures associated with the languages and the lifestyles they were thought to express. In contrast, it stigmatized languages that were not understood to reach these standards—like the participant’s mother tongue, which was considered less powerful—or represent these ideals, like Chinese and Russian, which were associated with “less developed” cultures. Therefore, the superiority of major EU languages was perceived to be an inherent characteristic, justifying the foreign language learning “tradition” participants described and cementing long existing language hierarchies and the place of the participants’ mother tongue in them.

As the data indicate, each language was understood to contribute to the learner’s capital in a particular manner: through its sociopolitical prestige, its long cultural history, or by providing access to global markets. Foreign language choices were perceived as products with different attributes, and for this reason, participants explained that FLLs in Greece tend to choose
languages perceived appropriate for their purpose(s). Chinese and Russian were understood to provide access to the new economy, although they were not viewed as contributing to the learner’s capital in any other significant way. These languages were characterized by high instrumental value, but they did not carry other desirable traits from which the learner could benefit in terms of identity, which was also the primary reason they were understood as not suitable for young learners. The fact that Chinese and Russian are not currently widely associated with certificates, which were described as the backbone of language learning in Greece, also influenced perceptions of the utility of the languages, their status as “legitimate” foreign language choices that are going to stay relevant with the passing of time, and their appropriateness for certain learners only.

The entrance of Greece in the EU had shaped the foreign language trends which nurtured the participants as young FLLs. Now, as adults and young parents, participants live in a time when the rise of new economic powers and the globalization of economy has brought new additions to the foreign language culture that existed in Greece for the past forty years. The ideologies that governed the foreign language tradition participants were raised in were based on the ideas of prosperity and modernity associated with the EU, and the fostering of a common European identity. Although foreign language learning was understood to take place in that context for advancement of the learner’s economic capital, the data analysis shows beyond doubt that for the learners interviewed for this project identity emerged as the most important factor fueling investment in several foreign languages that had little applicability in their lives. In contrast, neoliberal ideologies that are based on profit recently launched Chinese and Russian into the fray of FLE in Greece, which is also the reason why languages that were associated with negative symbolic value in the Greek national context are now considered along with more
popular foreign language choices. As Duchêne & Heller (2012) point out, in the context of globalized economy, ideologies that view language as a source of pride which is linked to identity are meshing with recent neoliberal ideologies which treat language as a source of profit. Even though Duchêne & Heller’s (2012) discussion of the “pride and profit” trope was based on heritage languages, their conclusions seem applicable to the national context of Greece and the tradition of valorized multilingualism that, according to the data analysis, appears to be a part of the linguistic identity of the interviewees and is driven by both old nationalist ideologies that link language to identity, and new neoliberal ideologies that view investing in language solely in terms of economic profit.

In this way, although Chinese and Russian continuously emerged in discussions of the current most popular foreign language choices in Greece, there was a clear differentiation in terms of investment, which was influenced by the symbolic value associated with them. The perceived correlation of Chinese and Russian to economic profit made them attractive choices for Greek FLLs. However, there did not appear to be a tradition of associating these languages with prestige in Greek FLE. Thus, learning Chinese and Russian was described more as a matter of “profit” than “pride” (Duchene & Heller, 2012). The negative symbolic value associated with them did not support investment in the languages in terms identities and ideologies, as they were not seen as enabling learners to express affiliation to desired imagined communities and exercise symbolic power associated with major EU languages. Hence, Chinese and Russian were not perceived as suitable to form the basis of the individual’s cultural capital in terms of foreign language learning, and it was considered more appropriate to learn them at an older age, when the individual has already gathered all the necessary resources that will allow them to claim imagined futures and consequently a wide array of desired identities.
CHAPTER 7
Conclusions and Limitations

In this project I performed a thematic analysis of thirty-three semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with Greek FLLs, grounded on the sociological construct of investment. Investment provided a comprehensive tool to examine the different layers of commitment to language learning and how it can be affected by the symbolic value of languages. With its focus on capital, identity and ideology, the construct of investment made it possible to investigate how committing to different foreign languages allowed learners to: i) acquire skills they believed would advance their economic, symbolic, social and cultural capital, ii) assume desired qualities through learning languages with the appropriate symbolic value that would enable them to index group and status membership and claim imagined futures and identities, and iii) navigate power hierarchies at domestic and international levels.

The symbolic value discussed here is subject to change like all “brand images,” depending on the economic, political and historical factors that influence learner attitudes and ideologies. However, the examination of how the different cultural and social meanings associated with foreign languages choices affect Greek FLL investment in multiple foreign languages provides insight into how modern learners construct the mosaic of their identity. Therefore, this research contributes to the literature on learner investment by examining commitment to learning multiple foreign languages and providing insight into how this process enables individuals to constantly redefine their identities in the context of globalization. As the data showed, even when learners did not have an immediate practical need for a language they had committed to, it still served in modern self-making. The modern personal and national
identity of being Greek and European was not simply “inherited,” but was a project that learners deliberately constructed through enriching their capital with qualifications that indexed desired affiliations through their symbolic value (Giddens, 1991).

Although multilingualism has a long presence in Greece due to the political and historical events that unfolded in the wider geographic area, the data reported in this project are better understood as an EU artifact of globalization, a tradition of valorized multilingualism that is based on paid foreign language services, the race to enrich one’s capital to be competitive in the labor market, and the symbolic consumption of languages to index modern and empowered identities. The national context of Greece is strictly monolingual, and all foreign languages discussed were perceived as foreign, including English, which was described by participants as playing such an important role in their everyday lives and functioning as a “second language.”

Investment in multilingualism was a means to construct an outward-looking identity (Mitsikopoulou, 2007). Participants did not only view multilingualism—in and beyond English—as a means to increase their economic capital, but also as an important part of being Greek and a vital part of their European identity and citizenship, consequently reaffirming that in the context of the globalized economy, old national ideologies that view language as a source of pride linked to identity are being enmeshed with neoliberal ideologies, which treat language as a source of profit (Duchène & Heller, 2012).

Nevertheless, it is not clear whether Greek learners of different generations and social and economic backgrounds than the ones participants belonged to have the same commitment to multilingualism in several languages of the EU. The participants whose views were analyzed in this research belonged to the generations that experienced the cultural impact of the educational shift caused by the transition of Greece in the EU through the “imposed” foreign language
learning that started from the public school and gave rise to a thriving private FLE industry. As previously discussed, participants explained that they and their parents belonged to an aspiring social class, which hoped to amass social and economic power through multilingualism that was indexing modernity. How individuals from different generations who did not experience this educational shift the same way, or from the same generations but from different socioeconomic backgrounds view multilingualism beyond English in terms of their identity, if they prescribe the same symbolic value to the languages discussed here, and if this value affects their commitment to foreign language learning in similar ways are questions that could be addressed in future research.

There also seems to be a correlation between the educational background of the participants and their commitment to multiple foreign languages. Acquiring a university, or college, degree and certification in multiple foreign languages was described as the “optimal packet” of qualifications they were expected to amass to be competitive in the labor market and to accrue symbolic power domestically. Participants explained that their academic qualifications were not complete unless they were supported by certification in multiple foreign languages. Therefore, one more direction for future research could be to examine if learners of different educational backgrounds have the same commitment to learning multiple foreign languages and if the symbolic value associated with them enables them to index desired domestic and transnational identities, as it was the case for the participants examined in this project.

Additionally, the economic recession that has been under way the past years has influenced multiple facets of life in Greece, including education. Although participants stated that they hoped their children would pursue multilingualism beyond English outside public school, it is unclear what the potential of the average household to support this endeavor is at this
point. The most recent report on the expenditure of Greek households on education indicates that despite the economic recession Greeks did not drastically reduce the amounts they invest on their children’s out of school education, including foreign language learning (GSEE Center of Educational Policy Development, 2018). Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that young FLLs in Greece are currently following the foreign language learning “tradition” described by the participants. The interviewees explained that they and their parents invested in the “promise” of multilingualism for social and economic ascension and to conform to societal norms, even when it was not clear how knowledge in multiple foreign languages would be directly applicable to their lives. Multilingualism beyond English was desirable because, even when not directly practically applicable to participants’ lives, it was a crucial part of their identity as EU citizens and modern Greeks. Young Greek FLLs are currently raised in a different economic climate that is defined by austerity, which triggered a new wave of migration from the country (Smith, 2015). These developments could influence their language learning trajectories by guiding them to be more selective in the languages they commit to in order to more accurately address their future plans, thereby placing more emphasis on instrumental motivation. This project attempted to capture a snapshot of the investment of learners belonging to a generation that was heavily influenced by the introduction of Greece in the EU and the brief economic prosperity that followed it. Examining the investment of current young FLLs and comparing it to the investment of the participants described here, to better understand the political and socioeconomic forces that shape learner commitment to language learning in modern nation-states could also be addressed in future research.

Furthermore, social, political and economic developments in recent years have drastically shifted the power balance in the EU and internationally, affecting Greek FLL ideologies and
attitudes towards foreign language learning. For example, recent tensions with Germany over 
the economy have influenced Greeks’ attitudes towards the language and ideas of imagined
futures involving it. This is also evident from the data analyzed in this project, that showed
participants not expressing the same degree of fondness for German and its culture as they did
for other popular language choices, although it was still recognized as one of the most
“representative” EU languages. Both German and French appear to retain their prestige as
foreign language choices in Greece but, as previously discussed, given the recent economic
developments on an international level, Chinese and Russian are emerging as possible popular
future foreign language choices. In this way, it remains to be seen if changes in the economic
orientation of Greece will also influence the ideological orientation of learners of different
generations, and if that change will affect learner investment to multilingualism and the
languages they choose to learn.

Thus, this research looked at Greek FLL investment in multilingualism at a time when
English in Greece is perceived as a common skill whose absence may be catastrophic for the
individual professionally or socially, but whose presence does not necessarily guarantee
economic or social benefits due to its wide availability in the labor market. Learners are called to
enhance their linguistic capital through other foreign language learning choices and through the
acquisition of as many certificates as possible to overcome gatekeeping based on foreign
language knowledge and certification, even if the actual language knowledge might be of limited
practical relevance to their everyday lives. The current shape of modern FLE in Greece serves
the purposes of this system, as it is heavily commodified and almost entirely tailored and based
on the certificate acquisition process, and further supports the belief expressed by learners that
language learning in Greece is not about knowledge, but about certification. In this context of
commodified FLE, learners are invested in the objectified form of linguistic capital and in multilingualism beyond English because they make a rich repertoire of desirable identities available to them.

Committing to multiple major EU languages by attending classes at private FLIs and acquiring certification in these languages was a form of symbolic consumption that allowed learners, or their parents, to comply with group norms and express their status and group membership, as well as fulfilling the aspirations of their social class. The qualities assigned to the languages were thought to pass to the learner through consumption, namely language acquisition, but mainly through certification. Products are attributed symbolic value in the markets where they circulate, and the data analysis showed that in the highly commodified context of modern Greek FLE, foreign languages were treated as commodities associated with different types of symbolic value. Languages spoken in influential and powerful countries of the EU were characterized by positive symbolic value, which was associated with notions of prestige, superiority, modernity and affluence. The term “European,” which was frequently mentioned by participants, was used to indicate a brand. Through this term they made the distinction between languages spoken in powerful countries of the EU that were characterized by positive symbolic value, and languages spoken in countries with less symbolic power that could have been members of the EU or located on the European continent. Although participants discussed their understandings of the value of different languages based on what they believed to be purely objective grounds, namely what languages would be most useful to invest in for greater economic gain, the interviews revealed that history, politics, social events and the language attitudes and ideologies they generated influenced perceptions of symbolic value, which in turn shaped perceptions of inherent linguistic capital associated with these languages.
Investment in the “right” languages was thought to be of great importance as positive cultural and social meanings associated with them were appropriated by the learners and employed in the construction of desired identities. Thus, learning languages such as English, German, French, Spanish and Italian allowed participants to affiliate with local and transnational imagined communities, claim imagined futures, and consequently have access to a broader array of empowered personal and professional identities. More specifically, multilingualism in more than one of these major EU languages enabled learners to forge a “more” European, middleclass-aspiring, and/or cosmopolitan identity that transcended the limitations posed by the current political and economic events in Greece. Therefore, despite the low economic profit of their investments and the lack of practical relevance of the knowledge of languages other than English in their everyday lives, participants felt multilingualism in more than one of these languages was justified, since as Gerhards (2012) also notes, “the future belongs to multilinguals” (p. 51).

Foreign language knowledge in at least two EU languages was perceived as an essential part of the individual’s capital and for this reason the majority of participants wished for their own children to follow the same educational trajectory.

Recent political, social and economic developments in Greece and internationally have afforded new foreign language choices in private Greek FLE. Unlike the languages that formed the backbone of private FLE since it became a mainstream educational institution in the early 80s, Chinese and Russian, two of the most popular new additions and the languages most frequently discussed by participants as such, did not belong to the EU. This was a crucial factor in influencing the symbolic value associated with them and shaping intentions to commit to these languages. The data showed that in the minds of the participants positive symbolic value was only associated—to different degrees—with any language related to the EU and the ideals it
represented. Although participants were willing to invest in Chinese and Russian because of their increased economic relevance in Greece, the negative social and cultural meanings associated with the languages appeared to influence the type of commitment to them. Due to their negative symbolic value, Chinese and Russian did not fit the migration/study/live abroad to improve one’s life narrative that accompanied foreign language learning in Greece and justified investment in multiple foreign languages. Therefore, since they were not thought to allow learners to assume a wide range of identities, the languages were deemed unsuitable to form the basis of the cultural capital of Greek children; as participants indicated, Greek parents do not entertain the prospect of their children going to these countries in search of a better future. Consequently, Chinese and Russian were to be learned only if the professional need arose and certification in them was not described as a priority.

Thus, the social and cultural meanings associated with different foreign language choices shaped perceptions of which languages have inherent linguistic capital. Although as the data suggest, intentions to advance one’s economic capital play a major role in selecting which languages to learn, the lines are blurred between what can in reality be practical and what is considered inherently practical because of its positive symbolic value. For the participants in this project, learning languages other than English did not advance their economic capital in any significant ways. However, investment in major EU languages was justified because their positive symbolic value allowed learners to claim desired identities and resulted in inherent linguistic capital being attributed to them on the basis of their prestige. Investment in major EU languages had more to do with trust in the “brand” than actual economic or professional benefits these FLLs had from learning them. These judgments directed learners towards a specific set of
languages whose hierarchies were normalized, creating a discourse of what languages are “inherently useful” and therefore worthy of investment.

Even though the symbolic value analyzed here was temporally and spatially specific to the decades following Greece’s introduction in the EU and the national context in which this research took place, the social and cultural meanings associated with foreign languages are an important factor to be considered in the context of modern commodified FLE, and language learning in general. Studies on investment (Gao et al., 2008, Gu, 2008) increasingly call for examination of learner connection to language learning with a focus on the changing economic, sociocultural and political context of modern nation-states. Analysis of the symbolic value associated with different language choices and how it influences learner investment is a means to achieve this. The “brand image” of languages is not something that only exists as a disembodied concept in the minds of learners. As the data showed, the symbolic value of languages can be shaped by narratives of migration, social, historical, political and economic events and it is constantly reinforced and constructed through ethnocentric stereotypes of the “Other.” The brand image of languages in modern FLE is also reproduced through images and narratives in language text books, classrooms, mainstream media, and advertising campaigns employed to promote languages and attract learners. Therefore, study of the symbolic value of languages as it manifests in the context of globalization and modern FLE can allow us to examine the social, political, and cultural narratives that galvanize leaner investment. A study of the symbolic value of languages also draws attention to the intense commodification of language in the form of certificates within the context of modern FLE, the gatekeeping purposes it serves, how it affects learner commitment to languages and contributes to identity formation.
In this way, through its focus on identity, ideology and capital, the construct of investment makes it possible to pursue a nuanced interpretation of Greek FLL choices and their complicated relationship to language learning. This research examined how investment in multiple foreign languages empowered learners to (re)construct their identities and imagine their futures within a monolingual nation that is part of a larger European community and the globalized economy. Given the highly commodified private FLE context in Greece, and that languages are generally treated as commodities within capitalism and the globalized economy, the symbolic value attributed to foreign language choices emerged as an important factor that influenced learners who pursued multilingualism as a form of symbolic consumption to index desired identities. Narratives of migration, social, historical, political and economic events shaped the ideologies and attitudes that formed the symbolic value attributed to languages, which in turn influenced judgments about which languages carry inherent linguistic capital and shaped learned investment. The symbolic value associated with languages influenced understandings of material and symbolic gains in terms of capital, it rationalized consent to established foreign language learning practices, and it reinforced narratives of imagined futures, communities, and identities associated with specific foreign language choices. Thus, by examining symbolic value and Greek FLL investment in multilingualism, this research considered how the commodification of modern FLE can influence language learning and engaged with sociocultural and sociopolitical factors that influence learner investment. In the context of globalization and modernity, these are forces that should be taken into consideration to gain a better understanding of the multi-faceted nature of learner investment.
APPENDIX I

Language Attitudes and Ideologies

Language Ideologies
- Beliefs about language as an aspect of a larger social, political, and economic system.
- Explicit beliefs about language.
- A complex, layered space where ideological, behavioral, and institutional aspects interact.

Language Attitudes
- Beliefs and behavioral tendencies towards language that are connected to the values of individuals and have cognitive, affective, and cognitive components.
- Internalized dispositions about languages that learners might, or might not be aware of, and are enacted in different ways.
- Emphasis on individual feelings and expressions.

Methods: survey, attitudinal interviews, matched sample, test analysis, analysis of sociolinguistic samples.

1 (Kroskrity, 2000)
2 (Silverstein, 1976)
3 (Brown, 1995)
4 (Dervin & Norton, 1985)
5 (Zhu & Hopper, 1985)
APPENDIX II

Interview Protocol

Introductory questions
1. Where were you born and raised?
2. Did your parents/grandparents speak a language other than Greek?
3. Were you ever taught a foreign language? (when, how many, for how long)

Construction of Linguistic Capital- Symbolic value and Linguistic capital
4. Do you like the languages you learned?
5. Why did you choose to learn these specific languages?
6. How did you believe these languages would be useful to you in the future?
7. When/where did you get a chance to use these languages?
8. Which language/s would you like your children to learn? Why?
9. Why do you think we believe language learning is so important that we pay to learn foreign languages in private institutes, although foreign languages are taught in schools for free? And then why do we also pay extra to get certificates in these languages?
10. Why is learning only English as a foreign language not enough, as it is currently perceived as the language of international communication and economy and undoubtedly the most popular foreign language?

Objectified Capital-Commodification of Language
11. Did you get a certificate in the languages you learned? Why/Why not?
12. Were your certificates useful to you?
13. Do you think getting a language certificate is an important part of the language learning process in Greece? Why/Why not?

14. Would you like your child to get a language certificate at a young age, like you did?

**Symbolic Value of Foreign languages**

15. What are the languages Greeks learn the most in your opinion?

16. Why do you think these specific languages are less popular than others?

17. Do we believe in Greece that some languages are better learned as a hobby and others for professional reasons?

18. Would you say that in Greece we believe that some languages are less prestigious than others? Why?

**Symbolic Value and Learner Identity**

19. Do you believe as Greeks we have the inclination to learn foreign languages? Why/Why not?

20. Is language learning an important part of the individual’s education in Greece?

21. What do you think language learning/knowledge of foreign languages means for Greeks? Why is it so popular?

**Wrap-up Questions**

22. Is there anything else you would like to add that I have not asked you already?
References


