

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: JAMES E. ALATIS: A LIFE IN LANGUAGE
Nicole Marie Coomber, Doctor of Philosophy, 2012

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This oral history tells the story of James E. Alatis, who served as dean of the Georgetown School of Languages and Linguistics (SLL) and as the first executive director of the professional organization Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Born to Greek immigrants in Weirton, West Virginia in 1926, his preparation for leadership in language education included an upbringing as a child of immigrants and Greek community school. In this environment, Alatis learned to be an interpreter for his parents and for his community. In his later leadership of transformational organizations in the language education field, he institutionalized a style of leadership characterized by the ability to promote a vision and interpret the needs of various groups. His interpretive leadership style fostered collaboration towards a common vision. His story underscores the essential role of linguistics in language education, advocates for a close relationship between government and academia, and promotes applied linguistics as key for language learning and scholarship. He leads by facilitating collaboration and translating among different groups. His vision of language education proved prescient after over forty years in the field of language education and despite challenges presented to it by a change in leadership at TESOL and the closing of the SLL. Alatis's story both opens a window to this period of history in language education and stands as an example of academic leadership in the field.

JAMES E. ALATIS: A LIFE IN LANGUAGE
AN ORAL HISTORY

By

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Dedication Page

For Tony, the light of my life.

For Bob, the love of my life.

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List of Abbreviations

ACLS – American Council of Learned Societies

ACTFL – American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages

ALI – American Language Institute

CAL – Center for Applied Linguistics

DEFL - Division of English as a Foreign Language

EFL – English as a Foreign Language

ERIC – Educational Resources Information Center

ESEA – Elementary and Secondary Education Act

ESL – English as a Second Language

ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages

ExTFP – Experienced Teacher Fellowship Program

FLL – Faculty of Languages and Linguistics (at Georgetown University)

GURT – Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics

JNCL-NCLIS – Joint National Committee on Languages – National Council on Languages and International Studies

LCTLs – Less Commonly Taught Languages

MLA – Modern Language Association

NDEA - National Defense Education Act

SLL – School of Languages and Linguistics (at Georgetown University)

TEFL – Teachers of English as a Foreign Language

TESL – Teachers of English as a Second Language

TESOL – Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

TOEFL – Test of English as a Foreign Language

Chapter 1: Introduction

The United States has long had unclear and changing policies on the teaching of foreign languages. Languages were taught in schools and in immigrant communities, but a lack of a systemic national policy made languages vulnerable. During times of crisis such as World War I, speaking languages other than English, especially those of “the enemy,” became seen as seditious. Citizens were prosecuted for learning and teaching foreign languages. At other times of crisis, such as during the Cold War, or more recently after the 9/11 attacks, learning Russian and Arabic were deemed essential to national security. During these times, the federal government stepped up funding to teach these “languages of the enemy.”

Advancing the teaching and learning of languages required leaders who could interpret their relevance to a larger audience. Although the value of language learning may seem apparent to those who already believe in the power of language education, many remained unconvinced that languages are a necessary subject to teach, fund, and promote. An example of leader who interpreted the importance of languages in the American educational system through his work was William Riley Parker, who wrote *The National Interest and Foreign Languages*. The work was seminal in creating the language title of the 1958 National Defense Education Act.

James Efstathios Alatis picked up the mantle of Parker and has continued to interpret the importance of languages to American society in the post-NDEA era. Alatis served as dean of the Georgetown School of Languages and Linguistics for over twenty years, founded and led the association Teachers of English to Speakers of Other

Languages (TESOL), and was instrumental in creating the language lobbying association the Joint National Committee on Languages and National Council on Languages and International Studies (JNCL-NCLIS). His leadership made these organizations models of language education, research, and advocacy during the past fifty years. As a leader, Alatis mediated among factions within these organizations, who were many times at odds. Alatis's interpretation and persuasion of faculty, students, administrators, and association members moved them towards a common vision of making the languages, in his words, "prominent and permanent." His interpretive leadership allowed him to translate the importance of language and linguistics education to a larger audience around the country and around the world. Through his leadership, he has founded organizations with a lasting impact on translating to society the necessity of language study. This paper, an oral history of Alatis, reveals the impact of his interpretive leadership on language education in the United States.

"One might want to start from the beginning. And how I got involved in languages at all. My parents were Greek."

James Efstathios Alatis

In our first conversation, James Efstathios Alatis linked his leadership in language education and linguistics to his birth in a Greek immigrant family. His three simple sentences demonstrate the value of an oral history of Alatis, which creates a narrative of his life in time. Oral history explores the relationship between a person and his or her historical context. Alatis's education and leadership in languages and linguistics occurred during a transformative period in language education in the United States. His oral testimony and the historical context of his life offer an instructive narrative about language education during the post-World War II era. Alatis's life story gives insight into

how individuals become leaders and make an impact in their field. In his youth, Alatis learned to interpret among various communities. He employed that skill in his leadership interpreting the needs of students, faculty, language educators, and administrators to foster collaboration through better understanding. Through his oral testimony, Alatis espouses a philosophy of how languages should be learned and taught, offering a viewpoint of the past and a vision of the future. His narrative captures his style of leader-as-interpreter to create collaboration and compromise. This introduction will outline Alatis's life and its significance; introduce research questions; outline subsequent chapters; discuss important terminology; and delineate the benefits and limitations of this study.

James Efstathios Alatis has lived through a period of transformation in the field of language teaching. Born in Weirton, West Virginia in 1926, Alatis grew up in a Greek-speaking community in an English-speaking nation. He learned Modern Greek in a church-supported community school during a time when language learning was waning in the United States.¹ Although not well documented, community schools like the one Alatis attended served an important function of language maintenance for Greeks and for many other nationalities of immigrants in the United States.² His early exposure to Modern Greek later developed into an interest in two linguistic areas that would prove

¹ Language learning has waxed and waned during the course of the 20th century, with high numbers of students enrolled in high school studying languages at the turn of the century to low numbers around the time of World War I, when language study was seen as seditious by many states due to the high concentrations of Germans and other suspect nationalities studying in their native languages. See, for example, Dennis E. Baron, *The English-Only Question : An Official Language for Americans?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); John L. Watzke, *Lasting Change in Foreign Language Education : A Historical Case for Change in National Policy*, Contemporary Language Education (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003); William Riley Parker, *The Language Curtain, and Other Essays on American Education* (New York, NY: Modern Language Association of America, 1966).

² Joshua A. Fishman, *Language Loyalty in the United States: The Maintenance and Perpetuation of Non-English Mother Tongues by American Ethnic and Religious Groups* (London: Mouton & Co, 1966). p. 21.

essential to the post-World War II era of language education, English as second language (ESL) and the “neglected” or “less commonly taught” languages. Both ESL and the neglected languages came to the forefront of public policy during the Cold War area, when Congress passed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958.

His bilingual community and education in Greek gave Alatis an interest in words as a child. He spent hours as a boy perusing dictionaries, and was excited to discover English words with Greek origins. He was known in Weirton for having a great vocabulary, which he attributes to his knowledge of Modern Greek. This love of language became an academic pursuit in linguistics following his undergraduate work at the University of West Virginia and his brief service in the Navy. He studied English linguistics at The Ohio State University for a master’s degree and his doctorate, and received an American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) fellowship for a summer program at the University of Michigan. He studied with premier linguists of the era, such as Bernard Bloch, during a time when the study of linguistics was in transition from the Bloomfield era of structural linguistics to the Chomsky era of generative grammar.³ Alatis’s formation in linguistics prepared him to lead one of the foremost forums for linguistics scholarship, the Georgetown University Round Table on Linguistics (GURT). The round table brought together linguistic luminaries, and paved the way for discussions on new topics in linguistics, such as sociolinguistics, or the study of language in society. The round table interpreted the influence of linguistics in society and of society in

³ Structural linguistics began in the United States when Leonard Bloomfield wrote *Language* in 1933; “Bloomfield argued that the sound patterns of a language change in a systematic way, and that the road to discovering these changes lay through a rigorous establishment of procedures. To get at the right procedures you had to begin by excluding all non-linguistics criteria.” Chomsky rejected structural linguistics and argued that “the process that creates thought from abstract mental structures is one thing, the process that transforms thought into spoken language is wholly another.” Language for Chomsky has both surface and deep structures. From C.P. Otero, *Noam Chomsky: Critical Assessments* (London: Routledge, 1994). p. 29-30.

linguistics, allowing for increased understanding and dialogue about the role of linguistics in society at large.

Having participated in the revolution in language education brought on by both federal support through NDEA and new concepts in linguistics, Alatis brought this experience and vision to his leadership of important organizations in the field. He first worked at both the Department of State and the Office of Education administering NDEA funds for language education and research. In 1966, he completed his doctoral dissertation and joined the Georgetown University School of Languages and Linguistics (SLL) as Associate Dean and Associate Professor of Linguistics and Modern Greek. In 1968, he became a founder and the first executive director of the organization Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), a new professional association that acknowledged the growing cadre of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers and their need for professional development, research, and tools for their craft. Alatis took a fledgling organization and worked tirelessly to expand membership and create an international association for the promotion of ESL. At Georgetown's SLL, first as Associate Dean and then as Dean in 1973, Alatis supported the less commonly taught languages, brought in grant funding from government entities, and expanded the activities of the SLL abroad. Even after the SLL was folded into the Georgetown College of Arts and Sciences in 1994, many of these structures remain as part of the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics. At both TESOL and in the SLL, Alatis based his leadership vision on a belief developed during childhood and the World War II era that language opened doors and fostered peace among peoples. Alatis's leadership contains several elements: fostering collaboration between parties, creating and communicating a strong

vision, and serving as an interpreter between various parties to effectuate his vision. His leadership of TESOL and the Georgetown SLL is recognized by many in the field of language and linguistics education, earning him the epithets “Dean East,” “Mr. TESOL,” and “The Great One.”⁴

James E. Alatis’s involvement with important organizations in language education during a transformative era demonstrates how the structural forces of one’s cultural and historical moment influence the agency an individual exercises in leadership. The format for this study, an oral history, allows for a blending of Alatis’s voice from oral testimony about his experiences with the historical context of his lifetime. This study raises and addresses the following questions: What can Alatis’s biography tell us about the transformations in the field of language education from the end of the Second World War to the present? How did the early conditions of Alatis’s life shape his vision and orientation to the contours and possibilities of language learning, and what lessons can we learn from Alatis’s style of “leader as interpreter” to promote language education policy in the future?

Chapter Outline

This oral history of James Efstathios Alatis covers the time period from his birth in 1926 to the end of his deanship of the Georgetown University School of Languages and Linguistics in 1994. I have chosen to use a chronological approach for this oral history to reflect the nature of the genre as expressing a life in time. Including this chapter, which introduces Alatis, explains the significance of this study, introduces important terminology, and discusses limitations, there are six chapters in this

⁴ Interview at JNCL-NCLIS Delegate Assembly, April 2009; unpublished poem congratulating Alatis on his retirement (Appendix III).

dissertation. Chapter Two discusses methodology, including a discussion of oral history and a discussion of the practical methodology I used to conduct this study. The subsequent three chapters discuss Alatis's life chronologically. Chapter Three follows Alatis's life from his birth in 1926 in Weirton, West Virginia through his education and schooling and his two years as a Fulbright Scholar. Chapter Four discusses the important time he spent at the Department of State and the Office of Education, and covers his move into academia with his hiring at Georgetown University and as Executive Director of TESOL. Chapter Five chronicles his time spent as dean of the School of Languages and Linguistics at Georgetown, and the later closing of the SLL by Georgetown University. Chapter Six makes concluding remarks and discusses the implications of Alatis's vision on language education today. Throughout, I develop my interpretation of Alatis's leadership style, which I see as influenced by the trope of leader-as-interpreter among different interest groups.

A Note on Terminology

A discussion of the terminology that has been used during the historical period of Alatis's life provides essential context for this study. The evolution of the language describing the teaching of non-English languages in the United States represents transformation in the field itself, and deserves a brief theoretical discussion for clarity. The term "modern" language began as a way to distinguish the commonly taught languages of French, German, and Spanish from classical Greek and Latin.⁵ The term

⁵ "About the MLA," Modern Language Association of America, <http://www.mla.org/about>; Deborah M. Herman, "'Our Patriotic Duty': Insights from Professional History, 1890-1920," in *The Future of Foreign Language Education in the United States*, ed. Terry A. Osborn, *Contemporary Language Education* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 2002). P. 7-9.

foreign language when used in histories of language education in the United States often encompasses this same territory. After the NDEA was passed in 1958, foreign language began to refer to both the commonly taught “modern” languages of Spanish, French, German, Italian, and Russian and the “neglected” languages, which include Eastern European, Asian, Middle Eastern, and African languages.⁶ Neglected languages are also termed “critical languages” per a report from the American Council of Learned Societies in 1959.⁷ More recently, the terms “commonly taught” and “less commonly taught” (LCTLs) have come to be used in literature discussing the history of foreign language education.⁸ Alatis himself tends to refer to all of these terms: neglected languages, critical languages, and less commonly taught languages since he has witnessed the linguistic evolution of the terms over time. In general in this dissertation, I will use “commonly

⁶ "'Our Patriotic Duty': Insights from Professional History, 1890-1920."; Charles R. Hancock and C. Edward Scebold, "Defining Moments in Foreign and Second-Language Education During the Last Half of the Twentieth Century," in *Reflecting on the Past to Shape the Future*, ed. Diane W. Birckbichler (Chicago, IL: National Textbook Company, 2000); Kenneth W. Mildener, "Recent Developments in Foreign Language Teaching in American Schools and Colleges," *International Review of Education* 7, no. 4 (1961); Harry Kurz, "The Future of Modern Language Teaching," *The Modern Language Journal* 27, no. 7 (1943); J. David Edwards, Ashley L. Lenker, and Dara Kahn, "National Language Policies: Pragmatism, Process, and Products," *The NECTFL Review* 63, no. Fall/Winter 2008/2009 (2008); Kenneth W. Mildener, "Three Years of the Language Development Program (NDEA) Title VI," *The Modern Language Journal* 45, no. 7 (1961); Richard D. Scarfo, "The History of Title VI and Fulbright-Hays" (paper presented at the International Education in the New Global Era: Proceedings of a National Policy Conference on the Higher Education Act, Title VI, and Fulbright-Hays Programs, University of California, Los Angeles, 1998). P. 23: "In 1959, the Commissioner of Education, on the basis of a report prepared by the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), designated six critical languages: Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Hindi-Urdu, Portuguese, and Russian as requiring primary emphasis; 18 other languages as second priority emphasis; and 59 additional languages as third priority emphasis. Since the original emphasis of Title VI was on foreign language instruction rather than area studies, support for courses other than language, while authorized, was given a secondary role."⁷ *The ACLS Newsletter*, (American Council of Learned Societies, 1959).

⁸ George Vaught, "Foreign Language Recommendations of the President's Commission," *The Modern Language Journal* 4, no. 1 (Spring, 1980); Rose Lee Hayden, "Toward a National Foreign Language Policy," *Journal of Communication* 29, no. 2 (June, 1979); Richard D. Brecht and A. Ronald Walton, "National Language Needs and Capacities: A Recommendation for Action" (paper presented at the International Education in the New Global Era: Proceedings of a National Policy Conference on the Higher Education Act, Title VI, and Fulbright-Hays Programs, University of California, Los Angeles, 1998); Leon I. Twarog, "Foreign Language Recommendations of the President's Commission and the JNCL Resolutions on Language in American Education: An Analysis," *The Modern Language Journal* 64, no. 3 (Autumn, 1980).

taught” and “less commonly taught languages” or LCTLs, the latter referring to languages other than Spanish, French and German.

A term that has seen less evolution but has also experienced linguistic transformation is the term “foreign language” itself. I first experienced resistance to terming the teaching of languages other than English “foreign” as a French teacher at a private school in New York. The New York State Education Department website uses the term “Languages Other Than English (LOTE) for their standards in teaching foreign languages.⁹ A brief look at the websites of other large states reveals a similar trend: as in New York, the Texas Education Agency uses “Languages Other than English (LOTE);”¹⁰ the California Department of Education, the Florida Department of Education, and the Maryland State Department of Education use the term “World Languages;”¹¹ The Ohio Department of Education, as well as the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) both employ “Foreign Language” for their standards.¹² LOTE and “World Languages” acknowledge that even within the United States, English is not always the first language of the students we are teaching. In this paper, I have chosen to use the general term “language,” taking a cue from Alatis. Since language can refer to the teaching of English and non-English languages, it is more universal than using the qualifier “foreign.”

⁹ "LOTE Learning Standards Publications," New York State Education Department, <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/lotelotels.html>.

¹⁰ "Languages Other Than English (LOTE)," Texas Education Agency, http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=5713&menu_id=720.

¹¹ "Next Generation Sunshine State Standards," Florida Department of Education, <http://www.fldoe.org/bii/curriculum/sss/>; California Department of Education, "World Language Content Standards for California Public Schools. Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve.," ed. Faye Ong (California Department of Education, 2010); "World Languages," Maryland State Department of Education, http://www.msde.maryland.gov/MSDE/divisions/instruction/world_languages.htm.

¹² "Foreign Languages," Ohio Department of Education, <http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEPrimary.aspx?page=2&TopicID=1696&TopicRelationID=1701>; "Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century," (Alexandria, VA: American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages).

A number of different terms also describe the concept of teaching English to non-English speakers. TESOL itself combined the terms English as a Second Language, the idea of teaching English to non-native speakers within the United States, and English as a Foreign Language, the idea of teaching English to non-native speakers in other countries. In English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) today, the terms ESOL and second language learning are used to underscore that English is not a “foreign” language for these students, rather one that they will learn in addition to their first language. I have chosen to use the predominant terms of this field. “ESL” and “second language learning” refer to English learning by non-native speakers. In addition, the term “heritage” is often used with language and speaker to refer to people who speak a language learned either in tandem with or before they learned English. Thus Alatis can be seen as a “heritage” speaker of Greek, and Greek his “heritage” language.

Benefits and Limitations

I began this dissertation seeking to research a topic that would benefit the field of language education. As I spoke to a number of individuals involved in language education policy, Alatis’s name came up many times as a figure of importance. An oral history of Alatis not only captures his individual story, but his experience of the context surrounding important moments in language education of the past fifty years. A comprehensive study of this time period in language education has yet to be written, and Alatis’s story provides but one perspective on the transformative era of NDEA. To create a narrative of his oral testimony, I reviewed literature that discusses the history of language education during this time. The reviewed literature has been organized

following the chronological structure of the dissertation, illuminating the transformative era of language education as it impacts Alatis's story.

Alatis's story provides a model of leadership and offers one vision of language education to fill in some of the gaps in the historical record of 20th century language education and policy. This study does not, however, create a comprehensive narrative of the history of language education during this time due to the nature of creating a biography. A biography of Alatis opens one window into this larger narrative. His role as a leader in the field makes this a story of significance to many who worked with him. His leadership provides a model to future leaders in the field and a vision of how languages and linguistics can be taught. The aim of my work is not to be comprehensive or to generalize his story, as the method and genre of oral history does not provide for this type of generalization. I believe the importance of this work lies in Alatis's singular story as a leader.

Other limitations arose in the access to materials. In particular, the Georgetown University Archives allowed limited access to records of the SLL. The policy of the Archives states

*Unpublished documents are governed by the following use restrictions: unpublished material dating from 1971 and later may only be consulted with the permission of the office which created it; unpublished material dating from 1970 or before may be used with the permission of the Archivist or the creating office, unless otherwise restricted.*¹³

I requested to see certain materials from a finding aid of the SLL materials, and was granted almost all the records. In reviewing the records, it appeared that some documents pertaining to the closing of the SLL were not shared. Certain important records I was able to view were notes of meetings with the provost and the Self Study

¹³ "University Archives," Georgetown University Library, <http://www.library.georgetown.edu/dept/speccoll/archives.htm>.

Report for the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, written in March of 1993, a year before the closing of the SLL. These records, an examination of economic pressures of that time, and oral testimony from Alatis and others allowed me to draw conclusions about the closing of the SLL. There does not exist, however, a definitive document stating the reasons for the closing. Indeed, this may be due to the myriad of pressures upon Georgetown University at the time.

Despite these challenges, the benefit of capturing Alatis's story for the field of language education policy and for other leaders in academia outweighs the limitations. The format of an oral history allows for Alatis's voice to be "heard" by others who seek to found organizations, such as Alatis did with TESOL, and to lead well-established ones like the SLL. I have found his approach to leadership, which was driven by a strong belief in the power of languages and marked by a belief in collaboration, to be instructive in my own career. The development of a strong vision founded on beliefs developed in childhood and the pursuit of that vision has, for Alatis, been a recipe for success in leadership. Many can benefit from understanding his passion and drive.

Chapter 2: Oral History: Genre and Methodology

To capture Alatis's contributions to the field of language education, I have chosen to use oral history to tell his story. Oral history captures the testimony of individuals or a group and places them in their historical context. The practice is both a method for data collection and a genre of history writing. For James Efstathios Alatis, oral history allows him to tell his life story in his own words. His narrative includes tales of growing up in Weirton, West Virginia; living in Greece during student protests over Cyprus; creating a network of linguists through his work at the Office of Education; and leading a premier school of languages and linguistics. The format allows for me to create a coherent narrative from his stories, fill in any gaps with secondary research and archival records, and interpret the meaning of his life's work. In this chapter on methodology, I discuss the method of oral history, including some limitations of the method. I then include a brief discussion of biography and the implications of that genre on my work. Finally, I discuss my specific project and the methods I used to gather data for this oral history.

Oral History: Deep Study of a Life

Oral testimony forms the basis for oral history. Many have used oral interviews to capture the voices of people over the years, forming a collection of tales and perspectives from individuals from many walks of life. Studs Terkel, a well-known interviewer who had a radio program from the early 1950s to 1999, is often cited as an oral historian because he captured powerful oral testimony through his interviews with people from all

walks of life.¹⁴ Terkel's interviews create what Charles Hardy calls "authoring in sound," where "real" people tell stories sometimes left out of written history. These types of interviews are prevalent in oral history, since many oral historians seek to capture the experience of ordinary people rather than the experience of elites who could write down their own stories via letters, journals, and in publications.¹⁵

For this oral history of James E. Alatis, I have based my methodology on the work of oral historians such as Alessandro Portelli, Paul Thompson, Paula Hamilton, and Linda Shopes, who balance the voice of an oral narrator with the context and perspective of an oral historian. Hamilton and Shopes remark that "Oral history helps us understand ...how an interview can reveal and shape what is known among and by others, even as it can also participate in a broader political process of public meaning-making."¹⁶ This scholarly definition of the field reflects my methodology; while there are extensive quotes to highlight and feature Alatis's voice as represented through our many interviews, I have balanced his voice with historical context, which can be thought of as structural determinacies.¹⁷ By using this method, Alatis's agency in navigating the course of his life, education, and leadership can be balanced with the structural determinacies that played a role setting him on a certain path.

¹⁴ "Chicago History Museum: Archives and Manuscripts," <http://www.chicagohistory.org/research/aboutcollection/archivesmanuscripts/?searchterm=studs%20terkel>.

¹⁵ Charles Hardy III, "Authoring in Sound," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson (London; New York: Routledge, 1998); "Talking History," <http://talkinghistory.oah.org/>. Due to budget cuts, OAH suspended *Talking History* in May of 2006. The archive continues to maintain records of previous aural histories and can be accessed.

¹⁶ Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, "Introduction," in *Oral History and Public Memories* ed. Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Term "determinacies" from Finkelstein, "Revealing Human Agency: The Uses of Biography in the Study of Educational History."

The presence of an oral historian allows for the interpretation of events, explanation of the narrator's point of view, and the creation of a bridge between the narrator's experiences and the wider historical context within which their experiences took place. The oral historian can paint a picture of the narrator, place a narrator's experiences in context, and interpret for an audience the significance of a narrator's experiences. The oral historian can also shed light on the personality and reveal deep attributes of character that shed new light on the narrator's story. The following passage from an interview with Dr. Alatis highlights an aspect of his personality not accessible through tapes or transcripts alone. His wife, Penelope Alatis, had been asked to teach English as a second language at the school where she taught English to native speakers.

*Alatis: And she came to me and said, hey, Jim, they want me to teach English as a foreign language. I said that's fine. Should I do it? Yeah, do it. Will you help me? Sure, I'm the world's greatest expert on English as a Foreign Language, I'll help you.*¹⁸

Alatis's references to his own expertise in English as a foreign language might be interpreted as revealing arrogance or superiority. In my own interactions with him, however, I realized that when he told a story in this way, with a quick back-and-forth exchange between him and another person, his own responses were meant to be tongue-in-cheek. Here's another exchange between Alatis and the president of Georgetown University, referring to the increase in students that had applied for the School of Languages and Linguistics.

*And Father Healy would say, What is it that you're doing that brings all these students here? I said, Sheer excellence, Father. Sheer excellence.*¹⁹

¹⁸ James E. Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. Digital recording. Washington, DC, February 26, 2009.

¹⁹ Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. Digital recording. Washington, DC, July 8, 2010.

Once again, the quick back-and-forth indicates a playful response by Alatis. I believe these exchanges to be lighthearted because in my interactions with Alatis, he demonstrated deep humility and a fear that he had not made enough of an impact. Alatis used this device, back-and-forth exchange between him and another individual, several times in our interviews. Each time he employed the device, the effect was humorous. The relationship we had developed over the course of two years of interviews allowed me to develop insight into his personality and to interpret his interviews more accurately. Without the benefit of a scholar to interpret the interviews, some nuances such as these are easily lost or misunderstood, even by someone listening to a recorded interview.

Another aspect of Alatis that an oral recording could not capture was his commitment to academia. He demonstrated this strongly through his choice of interview location. Each time I met with Alatis, we met in his office in the Intercultural Center at Georgetown University. Several times I offered to come to his house for the interviews, intending to make the process easier due to his declining health, but he always delicately declined and suggested interviews in his office. In this way, our relationship developed into a professor-student relationship, one with which we were both familiar and comfortable. Alatis demonstrated his commitment to academia through his interest in learning as well. He expressed interest in my studies, educating himself in oral history methodology and asking me to send him materials so that he could learn more about the discipline. Alatis also demonstrated incredible commitment to coming to campus each day to engage in his activities on campus, despite being hampered by declining vision and needing a walker to move around the Intercultural Center. He came to Georgetown for his classes and office hours each day, dressed impeccably with a sport coat or suit

jacket subtly accessorized with a pocket handkerchief. Alatis's dress made him appear as if he were still the dean of the SLL, and would be prepared to meet at any moment with a potential donor or student in appropriate attire.

My personal observations suggest what the discipline of oral history adds to the interview transcript. The oral historian interprets the words of the narrator and places them in context. This context may be a simple interpretation and explanation of tone, as in the first example, or it may be a revelation of character through how the narrator acts, rather than what he or she says. An oral historian can – and must – also go beyond the simple interpretation to place a narrator's stories in historical context. A narrator may be aware only of his or her own experiences; an oral historian can reveal whether or not a narrator's memories mirror those recorded in the historical record, or if they reveal new information about an historical time or place. The oral historian can also interpret the relationship between the structural forces of history, culture, economics, and politics and the agency exercised by the narrator in navigating his or her own life.

Many oral historians acknowledge that what a narrator adds to history lies not in the facts of a particular event, but insight into what events meant. Alessandro Portelli's assertion that what makes oral history worthwhile is that "it tells us less about events than about their meaning."²⁰ In Portelli's work, he discovers that his narrators give a different date for the violent death of their comrade Luigi Trastulli than appears in written records of the event. While the narrators are wrong in a factual sense, the reasons why they give the wrong date give Portelli information about their feelings towards the socialist uprising of their time. He explains that when presented with errors, "The causes of the collective

²⁰ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, SUNY Series in Oral and Public History (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1991).

error must be sought, rather than in the event itself, in the meaning which it derived from the actor's state of mind at the time; from its relation to subsequent historical developments; and from the activity of memory and imagination."²¹ The narrators tied the death to another more powerful moment in their town's history, thereby inveighing Trastulli's death with more meaning.

Paul Thompson further illuminates the questions historians must ask of all their sources, oral or written, explaining, "Social statistics... no more represent absolute facts than newspaper reports, private letters, or published biographies. Like recorded interview material, they all represent, either from individual standpoints or aggregated, the social perception of facts; and are all in addition subject to social pressures from the context in which they are obtained."²² Thompson elaborates, "Exactly the same caution ought to be felt by the historian faced, in some archive, by an array of packaged documents: deeds, agreements, accounts, labour books, letters, and so on. These documents and records certainly do not come to be available to the historian by accident... It is again necessary to consider how a piece of evidence was put together in the first place."²³ Without the critical eye to both written and oral sources, either can be suspect. The benefit of a narrator is that they can be questioned, presented with evidence, and the gaps in their story can be discussed.

An oral history gives us something different than a documentary history. First, a narrator always brings certain cultural traditions to his or her stories. John Caughey in *Negotiating Cultures & Identities* writes that "cultural traditions may be understood as

²¹ Ibid.

²² Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2000; repr., 1988, 2000). P. 122.

²³ Ibid. p. 124.

routinized ways of thinking that orient us to ourselves, other people, and the world.”²⁴ Especially in American society, with a heritage of many immigrant cultures, these cultures overlap and interweave to give different versions of the same historical events. For Alatis, his heritage as a Greek immigrant provided an important basis for his future interest in English language learning and the study of less commonly taught languages. This heritage provided a different set of determinacies for his life than he might have experienced if he had a different background. Elucidating the cultural traditions of a narrator’s story lends different meaning to the facts of history.

Oral history cannot be generalized, since each narrator, regardless of cultural heritage, does not speak for an entire group. A narrator’s observations, when interpreted by an oral historian, can become normative – instructive as to how people might behave or feel about a similar situation. I cannot generalize that every dean who experienced the ending of a program or the closing of a college would feel the sense of loss Alatis did when Georgetown University closed the School of Languages and Linguistics. I can say that his vision for the school and disappointment when it closed expresses a vision for what language teaching should be like. When future leaders in the field of languages and linguistics are considering decisions, Alatis’s biography can serve as a model for how things played out in his time, present one vision for language learning at the collegiate level, and function as a lesson in how that vision interacted with aspects of the historical context.

Oral History in Educational History

²⁴ John L. Caughey, *Negotiating Cultures and Identities: Life History Issues, Methods, and Readings* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006). P. 20.

The genre of biography is a prism through which to view history. Just as with oral history, the biography cannot be generalized in a scientific sense. Rather, it offers the reader a normative view based on one person's life. Taken from an artistic or literary perspective, biography, as Barbara Tuchman asserts, "encompasses the universal in the particular."²⁵ A biography reveals the complexity of a single life, providing a window into the specificity of one person's experience within his or her own historical context. It is the study of a life in time.²⁶ In this way, although a biography is not history writ large, biography can tell us an enormous amount about a particular time and place. Uncovering an individual's story in a historical biography reveals the interaction between a person and his or her historical context. As Barbara Finkelstein explains, "historical biography reveals the relative power of individuals to stabilize or transform the determinacies of cultural traditions, political arrangements, economic forms, social circumstances, and educational processes into new social possibilities."²⁷ An oral historian can investigate with a narrator how he or she feels about the determinacies of his or her life's context.

Biography created through the method of oral history offers additional benefits of allowing a historian to get closer to history through the viewpoint of a witness. Often, these witnesses are not those who are included in the official historical records. McFadzean explains, "Oral history has the potential to make accessible viewpoints of lives and careers which are not included in historical and collective memories, written histories, or official sources."²⁸ The experiences of these individuals round out the

²⁵ Barbara Tuchman, "Biography as a Prism of History," in *Telling Lives: The Biographer's Art*, ed. Marc Pachter and L. Edel (Washington, DC: New Republic Books, 1981). P. 134.

²⁶ *ibid.* P 8-9, 13 (double check to make sure these are paraphrases and not quotes)

²⁷ Finkelstein, "Revealing Human Agency: The Uses of Biography in the Study of Educational History."

²⁸ *The ACLS Newsletter*. P. 3.

historical record with a different viewpoint. Much like oral histories of a particular event or experience, a biography constructed through the method of oral history provides access to an often unknown and undocumented area of history. The difference between an oral history of an event and the oral history of an individual is the ability to trace the individual's life through time, to see the interplay between individual agency and the structural determinacies at play throughout the course of one person's life.

The story of James E. Alatis, an accomplished and published academic, well-known for his leadership of several organizations, presents another wrinkle into the view of oral history as a genre that records unknown lives. His life, were it not recorded in this fashion, would still appear in many records, from his own publications to the archives of the important organizations he led. Jonathan Soffer, in his article on oral history and the history of American foreign relations, suggests the benefit to interviewing high-profile figures. Written records of important events can sometimes be misleading. Soffer writes, "Certainly contemporaneous documents and published memoirs *may* be as self-serving as oral history interviews. Kissinger himself is quoted as saying, 'What is written in diplomatic documents never bears much relation to reality.'"²⁹ As Paul Thompson suggests, both written and oral sources must be questioned for why they are stating facts in a certain way.

The biographical project includes an additional element, that of an interpretive author. At all times during this project, my own interests, biases, and interpretations played an essential role as I interviewed Alatis and then began to write his biography. My background has had a profound influence on each step of my graduate career and

²⁹ Jonathan Soffer, "Oral History and the History of American Foreign Relations," *The Journal of American History* 82, no. 2 (1995).P. 608-609.

ultimately on my dissertation. I began my own study of language in high school with French, and found that second language skills opened many doors for me. I received a partial scholarship to college, where I studied French and English, used that funding to study abroad, and then received a fellowship that allowed me to complete a year of graduate work in Paris. After having many doors opened to me because of my language skills, I chose to become a French teacher. At this time, I witnessed the precarious place of French – from one year to the next, the enrollment in my middle school French classes dropped from 30 students to just five in the fifth grade class, the first year of language study. The year I came to graduate school to study language education policy, the school where I taught went from having two full-time French teachers to one.

Language education, however, was not a popular topic of study among education scholars. Language policy discussions seemed limited to linguists and language scholars, while education scholars focused on issues of race, class, gender, and policies such as No Child Left Behind. Thanks to connections with the language community in Washington, DC, I was able to network with “the field,” and I quickly came to realize that languages had continued to survive in U.S. education policy through the passion and dedication of a small number of people. Telling the story of one of those individuals through oral history was a way to bring together my interest in language policy with the interpretive methodologies I had learned in graduate school. In capturing the oral history of a passionate individual in the field, I hoped to capture a tale of leadership for both the language community and education scholars.

My mentors in the field, including J. David Edwards, influenced me to capture Alatis’s story. My experience having worked in the field and my desire to eventually

become an educational leader myself led me to seek out Alatis's story. I hoped to learn lessons from him for my own life as well as creating a narrative instructive to others. In my interviewing, my interest in his experiences learning languages was impacted by my own language learning in school. I also focused mainly on his professional career, only delving into more personal issues such as how he met and married his wife when my committee suggested it. It is possible to imagine that another author with a different set of interests and biases would focus on different aspects of Alatis's life. The narrative that I have created focuses primarily on his professional career, and his personal life is woven in with his professional one. I believe this to be most reflective of the narratives that Alatis presented to me in our interviews, but many interpretive possibilities exist depending on the views of the author. Kathryn Nasstrom, in her work examining the boundaries of oral-history based biographies, expresses this sentiment as well, writing, "I'm reminded that a published biography, with all the finality that product seems to imply, is only one in a sequence of understandings and renderings of a life."³⁰

In his work on interpretive biography, Norman K. Denzin goes so far as to call the biographical enterprise an "illusion," where the significance of a narrator's life is created by the interpreter.³¹ He goes on to write, "what must be established is how individuals give coherence to their lives when they write or talk autobiographies."³² The role of an interpretive author is to both uncover the narratives that undergird a narrator's oral testimony, and to create a narrative of the oral history narrator's relationship in his or her historical context. The context, what Finklestein terms "determinacies," can be

³⁰ Finkelstein, "Revealing Human Agency: The Uses of Biography in the Study of Educational History."

³¹ Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Biography* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989).P. 61-62

³² Ibid.

characterized as historical, cultural, economic, and political structures of the narrator's lifetime.³³ The narrator exercises "agency," a term from the interpretive tradition of qualitative research that refers to an individual's method and mode of acting out his or her life. Agency encompasses the decisions a narrator makes, the words he or she uses to express thoughts and ideas, and actions he or she takes in the course of a lifetime. The narrator and the interpretive author may both have a vision of what the exact balance between structure and agency is, and this balance may shift back and forth during the course of a narrator's life.

For my work with Alatis, I believe the primary structural forces of his life lie in his cultural heritage, that of Greek immigrants in Weirton, West Virginia; his historical context, that of the time surrounding World War II and the impact it had on language learning following the war; and his educational context, both the educational norms learned as a student, and the norms he worked with, and sometimes against, as an educational leader for the SLL and TESOL. Alatis drew upon his various contexts to create a new context for himself, that of the federal government and academia. He employed a common theme from his youth – that of being an interpreter between his two worlds – and used it to his advantage as a leader. Alatis's ability to channel his interpretation skills allowed him to later translate among various interest groups, such as faculty, administration, students, association members, and policy makers, to further his vision of creating a lasting place for the languages in American society.

Alatis inherited the cultural heritage of Greek immigrants to the United States, with its cultural traditions and emphasis on language maintenance. He drew upon the

³³ Finkelstein, "Revealing Human Agency: The Uses of Biography in the Study of Educational History."

language learning to move into a realm of academic culture, which developed into a new context for him of research, scholarship, and opportunities, specifically funding opportunities such as the Fulbright fellowship. He exercised agency by taking advantage of those opportunities, which then moved him into his next context, that of government, where he exercised agency to create research and scholarship. Taking advantage of his knowledge of funding and academic networks from the government, he moved into yet another context, Georgetown University and language education associations. As a leader he created opportunities, programs, and organizations, exercising even more agency than he had before. The balance between the structural forces in his life and agency continued to fluctuate, however, and the historical tide of budget cuts in academia in the early 1990s became too powerful for Alatis to overcome. Those economic realities resulted in the closing of the school. Despite that powerful wave of economic realities overwhelming his agency in leading the school, to this day Alatis still aims to make an impact through his work, making speeches, writing about the history of Arabic at Georgetown, and participating in the creation of this oral history. Through those exercises he demonstrates his belief in the power of individual agency and the ability to for an individual to make an impact. He continues to interpret on behalf of the languages, making the case again and again of their benefits.

The ability to capture the interplay between contextual and structural forces and individual agency highlights the utility of an oral history for telling the life story of a man such as Alatis. Challenges for this mode of inquiry lie in the singular nature of Alatis's story that cannot be generalized. I define oral history as a mode of inquiry that blends historical context with one voice to create an expansive narrative of the impact a single

life can have. This definition highlights what the method cannot do: provide an expansive, generalizable view on a historical phenomenon. In not providing this viewpoint, however, it achieves its goal of presenting the complexity of the context of a single life.

Practical Methodology

I began my work with Alatis in the spring of 2009, knowing that he was planning on retiring from Georgetown University in the near future. I conducted all of my interviews in his office at Georgetown, typically during the school year since he was on campus almost every day at that time. Our interviews continued during 2010, and during this time I conducted approximately 35 hours of interviews with Dr. Alatis. In 2011 I began to write portions of the dissertation proposal and the dissertation itself, and the nature of our relationship changed as I brought him items that I had written to verify the facts in the narrative. Due to Dr. Alatis's reduced schedule of being on campus, and his imminent retirement in the spring of 2012, we also began corresponding via email to verify portions of his story. His wife, Mrs. Alatis, and his son, Bill, also began to correspond with me to send me items from Dr. Alatis's personal library. The biography became a family project at this point, with Bill himself conducting a couple of interviews for me when it became apparent we needed to capture Dr. Alatis's thoughts on tape.

Working with a more scholarly narrator such as Alatis presented additional resources and challenges of interpretation. With his extensive knowledge of the developments in language education that took place during his lifetime, Alatis often educated me about the historical context in which he lived. One example of this occurred when I followed up with Dr. Alatis via email regarding his involvement in a program

teaching Cuban refugees. I asked Dr. Alatis to clarify when he had been involved in the program. He responded to me via email with an article about the time period to provide background.

Dear Nicole,

I've asked my son Bill to do some research around this nascent project and we unearthed this report which gives significant background on the development of Bilingual Education in the US and its English-Only opposition. It ties in with the NDEA post-Sputnik phenomenon in my Arabic Department History which you have.

Also, the "juicy" implication is that my program was a covert preparation for the failed Bay of Pigs invasion.

<http://www.jrank.org/cultures/pages/3643/Bilingual-Education.html>

See especially the section on "The Cold War and Bilingual Education: the Bilingual Experience"³⁴

Alatis added a tremendous amount of context to his own biography by contributing rare materials from his own library, personal letters, and unpublished copies of speeches he had delivered at a number of events. He provided articles on topics he thought to be pertinent, and passed along materials that he felt it was essential for me to read.

Due to his academic background and interest in scholarship, he actively sought to become a co-creator in his biography in a way that a non-academic narrator might not. I owe him a great deal for opening my eyes to the history of the time period not just through his oral testimony, but also through the documents he provided. His stature could be intimidating at times, and although I read all the materials he provided, I sought to maintain authorial independence by focusing primarily on Alatis's oral testimony to

³⁴ James E. Alatis. Email to Nicole M. Coomber, August 20, 2011.

inform and organize my narrative. I also made use of the archives at Georgetown University regarding the School of Languages and Linguistics, although some more sensitive records pertaining to the closing of the SLL were not available to me as I have previously mentioned. Despite any possible censorship, the records provided their own view of Alatis, as a man involved in all matters, large and small, pertaining to the school, and a man impassioned about his school and the teaching of languages and linguistics. The archival research helped provide some perspective – and distance – in creating the story of Alatis as a leader and professor.

I conducted interviews with Alatis's colleagues, including two professors, one administrator, and one association leader he had supervised and mentored during their careers. While these interviews did not elicit much material to include in the actual narrative, they served an important purpose of providing outside perspective on Alatis. The interviews allowed me to see his deep commitment to the SLL and to his work with TESOL. They also highlighted some of his flaws, including his commitment to mentoring and promoting people. His desire to give others a leg up sometimes made him promote faculty who might have been less than deserving. Each interview allowed me to develop better questions for when I returned to Alatis for subsequent interviews, and to understand some of Alatis's silences on particular issues. He never named names when it came to closing the SLL, although some of the others I interviewed did (sometimes with the tape recorder turned off). In my desire to honor Alatis's perspective on the closing of the SLL, and his sincere belief that those who he promoted were well-deserving, I have omitted the perspectives of others from the narrative that follows.

Working with a single narrator for the better part of two years, it is impossible not to develop a relationship that impacts the research. In *Envelopes of Sound*, a group of oral historians discuss the issue. Studs Terkel says, “You become involved with the person. At the same time if you become too much involved you lose your own perspective and become detached.”³⁵ You must become involved with the narrator to develop trust so they can share their story with you; however, you also need to find a way to take a step back and view their words with some objectivity. For me, my aim was to complete the interviews prior to beginning to craft the narrative. When I began to write the narrative, I came back to the interviews fresh, listened to them again, and took a chronological approach to writing. Since Alatis himself did not often present his story chronologically, holding fast to the timeline helped me organize his story and present it in a logical manner.

The nature of creating an oral history means that a relationship will develop between the narrator and the interpretive author. The creation of a narrative that shows a life in time involves choices – what to include and what to leave out. I do not strive for complete objectivity, but rather to present the biography of a man I respect, using his own words, so that others can learn about the vision of language education from one who has led and influenced the field. The interpretive author of this type of work cannot negate their influence and involvement. If, as Geertz suggests, “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun,”³⁶ my role is to interpret and untangle the webs of significance for Alatis. I have endeavored to do so with respect and with an eye

³⁵ Ronald J. Grele and Studs Terkel, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1985).p. 35-36.

³⁶ Clifford Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1973). P. 5.

towards his professional life in languages and linguistics, and acknowledge the many other interpretations that could arise from his oral testimony. My goal with my interpretation is to provide a document useful to the community of language and linguistic educators and policy makers, and to capture a legacy for this field.

Chapter 3: “My Parents were Greek.”

Dr. James E. Alatis attributes his leadership in languages and linguistics to his origins in a Greek American community. As a child, he spent his afternoons learning Modern Greek via the grammar translation method in the church-based Greek school. At home and in the community, his loved ones used Modern Greek for their daily communication. Situated in Weirton, West Virginia, Alatis learned and used American English daily in school and in the community. His awareness of language from a young age sparked a life-long passion for language learning and a deep, personal understanding of what it means to be bilingual. The Greek-American cultural inheritance and appreciation of language learning led from hours spent at the library perusing words to college and graduate education. His youthful interests formed a foundation for his later leadership in the field of language education. In particular, his role as a border crosser and an interpreter between the two communities established a trope of leadership Alatis would return to again and again in his leadership of language organizations. This chapter explores his young life in a Greek American community, his education in American schools through graduate school, and his time in Greece as a Fulbright Scholar. This cultural heritage formed the foundation of one of the structural foundations of Alatis’s life, that of cultural tradition. He experienced the structure of the cultural heritage but exercised agency through his interest in language and linguistics within the Greek tradition.

In our first interview on February 26, 2009, Alatis began by telling me of his cultural heritage as the child of Greek immigrants. When I asked him to tell his story, he replied,

“One might want to start from the beginning. And how I got involved in languages at all.” After a pause, he said, “My parents were Greek.” Alatis then went on to explain,

And, my mother was... from the Aegean and my father was a Greek immigrant from Cypress. So from the beginning, I was a coordinate bilingual in demotic that is colloquial Modern Greek and English. And that's how I got my interest in languages in the first place. I went to Greek school in the evenings after quote American school.³⁷

I asked if he learned Greek outside of afternoon Greek school.

Well of course my parents all they, it's all in Greek, it's a little Greek community. So my mother never did learn English. My father learned a little bit... So I've been involved in this Greek language and culture from the beginning.³⁸

In telling about his origins in Greek-American Weirton, Alatis quickly moved to trace the outlines of the rest of his career, from how he incorporated the Greek language into his master's thesis and dissertation at Ohio State University, worked at the State Department and then at the Office of Education, and moved on to leadership roles at Georgetown University and in TESOL. For him, the unifying thread of all these experiences was his Greek linguistic heritage, which stemmed from his parents' Greek origins.

Alatis could not recall the exact dates his parents emigrated from Greece, placing it generally in the early 1900s during what he called “the Great Immigration.” His father was from Cyprus and his mother from a small island called Chios. Alatis's parents came to America during a time when many immigrants from Southern Europe were flocking to the United States. Between 1890 and 1924, the period during which Alatis's parents emigrated, “nearly 7 percent of the total population [of Greece] had migrated.”³⁹ Although

³⁷ Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. February 26, 2009.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ioanna Laliotou, *Transatlantic Subjects : Acts of Migration and Cultures of Transnationalism Between Greece and America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004).. *Transatlantic Subjects: Acts of Migration and Cultures of Transnationalism between Greece and America*.

the migration rate is high, data show that more than 60% of migrants returned to Greece between 1908 and 1930, even if only for a short period of time before returning to the United States.⁴⁰ The Ottoman Empire encompassed many Greek communities before the Greek War of Independence in 1821, and even after the nine year struggle created a Greek state, “only a part of the population who were self-identifying as Greeks were actually residing within Greek national territory.”⁴¹ The data demonstrate similarities to other Southern European immigrants coming to the U.S. at the time as well as a tradition of Greek diaspora.

For this community, preserving Greek traditions and language were important. Alatis notes one way in which his family continued the traditions of their homeland:

My mother in those days, there was this business of arranged marriages and the idea of dowry and so on. And my mother was brought from Greece by her two brothers who were already here... and they were supposed to match her up with a prospective groom. My father had been in Egypt and he had been in Jerusalem, and he was relatively educated... And apparently he had some money, uh, and was looking like a good prospect. And I don't know what they had to give him as a dowry for my mother, in fact, that went through, into my day, and even the Greek Americans, though the business of dowries has been eliminated by law, but it still is being done.

His parents were following a tradition many Greeks brought with them when they immigrated, that of a dowry involved in the marriage. Marriages were arranged; in this way, the Greek-American community was able to preserve their language, religion, and cultural traditions. Greek immigrants to the United States often returned to Greece or intended to return, and marriage to a fellow Greek immigrant made a potential return

Laliotou's work draws upon sources in Modern Greek. This data comes from Ira Emke-Poulopoulou, [Problems of migration and repatriation] (Athens: Institute for the Study of Greek Economy, Greek Association of Demographic Studies, 1986), 39.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid. 53-54.

easier.⁴² Alatis references this desire, stating that, “in those days also, a pattern was that these Greeks would come with the idea of going back home with a bundle of money from the golden streets of the United States.” To preserve their heritage, many couples married despite significant age differences.⁴³ This was the case with his parents; his father was twenty years older than his mother.

Marriage was one way in which Greek Americans preserved their heritage; creating Greek communities centered on the Greek Orthodox Church was another. Of Weirton, Alatis said, “It was a little ghetto! And there was the church, there were the coffee houses, and they all spoke Greek, of course.”⁴⁴ Theodore Saloutos, the historian of Greek-American immigrants, affirms Alatis’s description: ““In the United States Hellenism and Greek Orthodoxy – the one intertwined with the other – served as the cord that kept the immigrant attached to the mother country, nourished his patriotic appetites, and helped him preserve the faith and language of his parents.”⁴⁵ Greeks emigrated for a number of reasons, including the economic incentives of working in towns such as Weirton for Weirton Steel, but in the diaspora maintained their ties with their homeland. For Alatis, the linguistic element was the central piece of this tie. Out of the many structural determinacies of his Greek heritage, he latched on to language as his area of interest within his cultural heritage.

Alatis began his education in languages in the early 1930s in afternoon Greek school, which took place as he says, “after quote American school.” The schools

⁴² Ibid.; Theodore Saloutos, *The Greeks in the United States* (Cambridge,: Harvard University Press, 1964). P. 31-32.

⁴³ Laliotou, *Transatlantic Subjects : Acts of Migration and Cultures of Transnationalism Between Greece and America*.

⁴⁴ Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. February 26, 2009.

⁴⁵ Saloutos, *The Greeks in the United States*. P. 122

provided five years of instruction in Modern Greek, with the option to repeat the fifth for six total years of instruction. The language maintenance by this and many other Greek American communities served a variety of functions.⁴⁶ The liturgy of Greek Orthodox religious services occurs in Greek, making Greek language a requirement for participation in the religious services at the heart of the Greek community.⁴⁷ Greek school also allowed students to become literate in the language spoken in the home. As he mentioned above, Alatis's father spoke some English, but conducted his business of Greek newspaper sales in Greek, and his mother spoke no English.

Greek school contributed to creating a cultural heritage for young Greeks in America. For a diasporic population, language maintenance provides a method of unification and identification with the home country. A study of 211 Greek Americans by Costantakos in 1982 found that Greek language maintenance held significant importance to cultural preservation because the language symbolized ethnic identity.⁴⁸ Evan Vlachos, a historian of Greek immigrants, writes "the absence of Greek language means, because of its central role in the ethnic culture, high structural and cultural assimilation" into American cultural traditions.⁴⁹ Assimilation has often been used as a way of describing the immigrant

⁴⁶ Fishman, *Language Loyalty in the United States: The Maintenance and Perpetuation of Non-English Mother Tongues by American Ethnic and Religious Groups*. The term language maintenance appears in this context: "Although American core society has usually been ignorant of the efforts of ethnic minorities to maintain themselves in its midst, such efforts have always been underway. Furthermore, from the very first, these efforts have been expressed within a broad context of religious, cultural, and value differences. Language maintenance, prompted by one or another variety of language loyalty, has frequently been a component – and at times, a catalyst – in these efforts." (p. 21).

⁴⁷ Alice Scourby, *The Greek Americans*, The Immigrant heritage of America series (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984). 90-95.

⁴⁸ Chryssie M. Costantakos, "Ethnic Language as a Variable in Subcultural Continuity," in *The Greek American Community in Transition*, ed. Harry J. Psomiades and Alice Scourby, *Modern Greek Research Series* (Ann Arbor, MI: Pella Publishing Company, 1982).

⁴⁹ Evan Vlachos, *The assimilation of Greeks in the United States, with special reference to the Greek community of Anderson, Indiana*, Publications of the National Centre of Social Researches, 2 (Athens,: National Centre of Social Researches, 1968). 104

experience. Until the twentieth century, many native born Americans held, for the most part “a confident faith in the natural, easy melting of many peoples into one.”⁵⁰ For the Greek community in Weirton, Alatis describes the mantra as “assimilate or starve,” and assimilation meant learning English.”⁵¹ The push-and-pull between learning Greek through the Greek schools, the survivalist need to know English, and the role both languages played in Alatis’s education demonstrates the transcultural nature of language learning for children of immigrants.

According to Alatis, the language had value beyond the element of cultural preservation. Greek gave him adeptness with language and an inherent interest in linguistics, which would become his future field of study. He spent hours in the library, consulting dictionaries and learning new words, especially those that had their origins in Greek. Learning more about languages became a way for Alatis to exercise agency within his cultural context. A brief, unpublished curriculum vitae he wrote attests, “he had grown up in two cultures and learned two languages simultaneously from childhood” and thus held a type of dual linguistic citizenship in English-speaking America and an Americanized Greek speaking community.⁵² Exposure to other families and children from Italian, Polish, and Serbo-Croatian backgrounds contributed to his understanding of other languages and cultural traditions.⁵³ For young Alatis, Greek and English were both borderland languages, mixing together, interchangeable in certain contexts, and fluidly influencing each other.

⁵⁰ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002). 234.

⁵¹ James E. Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. Digital recording. Washington, DC, April 28, 2009.

⁵² "Curriculum Vitae," (1973). See Appendix II.

⁵³ Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. Digital recording. Washington, DC, March 5, 2009.

For Alatis, Greek was not a *foreign* language; it was the language spoken in his home, church, and community. Traditional histories of language learning in the United States, which deal with *foreign* language learning, often examine immigrants learning English rather than studying the community schools where Greek and many other languages were taught to immigrant children.⁵⁴ Alatis's language study meshes into what Joshua Fishman terms "language maintenance" rather than *foreign* language learning. The period before and during the world wars evidences many efforts by immigrant communities to maintain their language capabilities. A population of over 13 million Americans claimed to speak a first language other than English on the 1910 census.⁵⁵ Although there is evidence that a number of different ethnic groups created and maintained "ethnic group schools" to preserve their mother tongues, scholars have paid little attention to this period and therefore the number of students studying in these schools during this period is difficult to ascertain.⁵⁶ A number of other factors, however, underscore the vibrant non-English speaking communities at this time, from foreign language newspapers to foreign language broadcasting on the radio.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ See, for example: Hancock and Scebold, "Defining Moments in Foreign and Second-Language Education During the Last Half of the Twentieth Century."; Hayden, "Toward a National Foreign Language Policy."; Twarog, "Foreign Language Recommendations of the President's Commission and the JNCL Resolutions on Language in American Education: An Analysis."; Elizabeth B. Welles, "Foreign Language Enrollment Numbers: Some (Mis)Interpretations Explained," *Modern Language Journal* 86, no. 2 (2000).

⁵⁵ Campbell Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Table 5. Mother Tongue of the Foreign-Born Population: 1910 to 1940, 1960, and 1970," U.S. Bureau of the Census, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/tab06.html>.

⁵⁶ Joshua A. Fishman and Vladimir C. Nahirny, "The Ethnic Group School and Mother Tongue Maintenance," in *Language Loyalty in the United States: The Maintenance and Perpetuation of Non-English Mother Tongues by American Ethnic and Religious Groups* ed. Joshua A. Fishman (London: Mouton & Company, 1966).

⁵⁷ Joshua A. Fishman, *Language loyalty in the United States; the maintenance and perpetuation of non-English mother tongues by American ethnic and religious groups*, Janua linguarum. Series maior, (The Hague,: Mouton, 1966).

One of Alatis's stories highlights the intersection of Greek language maintenance and the Greek longing for a homeland. Alatis's father worked as a newspaper salesman for two decades, and took his son to sell the *Ατλαντίς* (*Atlantis*) and the *Εθνικός Κήρυκας* (*National Herald*) newspapers.

I would go with him... to Steubenville, Ohio, Holidays Cove, West Virginia, and to Weirton. And we would go on the bus, and... we would deliver the Greek newspapers. It was the National Herald and the Atlantis. And oftentimes, my father would dress me up in a sailor's uniform, and the Greeks in the stores would see me, they would say, "And when are we going to take back The City, young man?" The City was Constantinople. That dream of the Greeks of going back.⁵⁸

The patriotism of the Greek shopkeepers and their desire to involve second-generation Greek-Americans in their stories demonstrates the powerful narrative of the Hellenic empire within the Greek-American community.

In some of his stories, Alatis serves as a spokesman for his community. He gives an example of negotiating between his Greek community school and his English-speaking American school:

There was the situation of the church and school, and the lack of paper and so forth in the schools because of the paper shortages in the war. I remember having gone to the principal of my school with my teacher. And we begged him for paper and he gave us reams of paper to use and so on.⁵⁹

He negotiated necessities for his Greek school, serving as an interpreter between communities. The story highlights Alatis's sense of belonging to both communities, holding a special role as a go-between for both of them. In this story, the communities are independent of one another and require a "border-crosser" such as Alatis for communication. Further, the community represented by his American school is in a

⁵⁸ Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. March 5, 2009.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

position of power. His Greek community, represented by his Greek school, must “beg” for support from the more well-placed and well-funded American school. This story introduces the trope of Alatis as an interpreter or translator between communities. As interpreter, he not only has to understand the words of both sides, but their needs and cultural identity. The trope of interpretation will appear again and again in Alatis’s life as he moves into leadership roles. As a child, it is how he cast his identity in his border-crossing community.

Another story underscores the idea that the Greek community was not wholly part of the surrounding American culture.

Alatis: I'll tell you another little story... there was a young man named Hippocrates Mastromichalis. He was my best friend. And one day we were called in by the principal. And there was a man who represented the FBI there with us. And, he asked the principal, "Are these the best citizens?" He says, "They are the best citizens on the campus." "Can they be trusted?" "Yes." What they wanted us to do was to go to a little store, which was run by an old Greek from Rhodes. Rhodes, of course, was in the hands of the Italians. And they figured that he was a, like a lot of the Japanese that they put in the internment camps. And they said go in and buy one of these illegal, pornographic comic books that he sells. And that way we can put him away. Well, my friend and I left, and we never did do that. It was a terrible thing to be asking us to do.

Coomber: How old were you?

Alatis: We must have been about in ninth or tenth grade. Yeah. Yeah. Those are interesting things that happened. And of course, everybody knew everybody else. Old Uncle George there, I would buy from him the cleaner in little bottles that I would use to shine shoes with. He was right across the street from us. And we never just did that. But there was a close knit community.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Ibid.

The use of the word “citizen” in Alatis’s story reveals a complex inner narrative. He highlighted to me on several occasions his American birth and citizenship, saying “People always think that, as I think I've mentioned to you, people would always ask me, how long have you been in this country? All my life I was born and raised in West by God Virginia.”⁶¹ The story of being asked by the FBI to inform on a fellow Greek immigrant reveals Alatis’s tension between his American birth and citizenship and loyalty to his Greek community. Despite being an American citizen, he also held loyalties to his Greek community. Once again, Alatis serves as an interpreter between the two communities. In this instance, Alatis decides not to “translate” the message from the FBI to his own Greek community.

The incident made such an impression on Alatis that he brought up the story again, revealing additional information about his self-perception.

Alatis: Well, ok. The story about that was, I and a friend of mine named Hippocrates Mastromichalis, were considered to be leaders in the school. And one day we were called into the principal's office and we were introduced to a man who was an FBI person. And what he wanted to do... in those extreme days isolating people who were potential enemies of this country like they did the Japanese. They wanted us to go into, there was a store of a man, of a Greek man from Rhodes. Rhodes was in Italian possession. And they suspected him of having Italian and therefore enemy interests. They wanted to put him away. I guess they had heard that he was selling pornographic comic books to young students, and that was against the law. They wanted us to go and buy some of those, and get the goods on the old man.

C: Mm.

A: And put him in jail.

C: Mm-hmm.

A: We never did. We just didn't think that was very smart. Or very ethical.

⁶¹ Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. April 28, 2009.

C: Did they come back to ask you?

A: No. They never did. Come back.

C: That would be scary.

A: Well, in those days it was scary. I mean, there were Greek, I mean Italian Americans with some of the leaders of the Italian community would have parades... or whatever and they'd dress up in uniforms and their bands and majordomos and whatnot. And there were two kids. Horatio and Steven Germado, interestingly, from Argentina that has just been transplanted to the United States as were a lot of other people from Argentina and uh, Steven and Horatio did not speak a word of English. And so I helped them and indeed some other Hispanic American kids and indeed my professor of Spanish used those kids as his informants because he himself didn't know much Spanish.⁶²

In the second telling, Alatis ties his inability to inform on a member of his community to helping non-English speakers learn the language. His vision of himself is as a person who bridges gaps, who helps others and is a citizen of the world, interpreting not only for his Greek community but for others in his school as well. Rather than taking part in the narrative of the World War that created enemies out of those with loose ties to Italians, Alatis sees himself as a compromise builder, a person with ethics who would not betray his own community or other communities. Again, despite the structural forces of political tensions and historical pressures, Alatis exercises agency through language, this time teaching fellow students English. In the re-telling of being asked by the FBI to inform on a fellow citizen, instead of highlighting his loyalty to the Greek community, he emphasizes his desire to help those in need of language skills as he would do later in his career.

⁶² Ibid.

High school was a time when Alatis encountered more traditional language learning that contributed to his life-long interest. He studied Spanish in high school and took advantage of the young men from Argentina to improve his Spanish.

In my case, I was good because the vowel system of Spanish is quite the same as in Greek. Their other sounds, like ch and rr (using Spanish accent) that are uh, straight from the Greek and when you, when you talk to people and I talk to people in Spanish they thought I was a native speaker.⁶³

Alatis attended high school from 1940 to 1944, a period marked by low enrollments in languages in the United States. Language education, at least among students enrolled in secondary school, reached a peak in the United States, with more than 40% of the high school population studying modern languages in 1915. This trend began to reverse in the run-up to the First World War.⁶⁴ During the late nineteen-teens and early twenties, teaching languages became as seditious as speaking them, and twenty-two states passed laws “hostile to foreign language instruction.”⁶⁵ Alatis told the stories of being asked to inform on a fellow citizen in the same interview as his discussions of language learning, both in Greek and Spanish. The juxtaposition suggests that hostility towards foreigners and “foreign-ness” of other languages are intertwined in Alatis’s memories and experiences. West Virginia in the run-up to World War II, in Alatis’s stories, shares the

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ These numbers are in some dispute. The 40% figure comes from Parker, *The Language Curtain, and Other Essays on American Education*. P. 112. Watzke portrays a different story on p. 16 with a graph that depicts the enrollments in foreign language education in the United States from 1889 to 1994, demonstrating that Although 80% of high school students were enrolled in foreign languages at the turn of the century, less than 10% of high the population aged 14 to 17 was enrolled in public high schools. He rectifies the enrollment data by demonstrating that about 8% of the population aged 14 to 17 at the turn of the century was enrolled in foreign languages. Watzke, *Lasting Change in Foreign Language Education : A Historical Case for Change in National Policy*.

⁶⁵ Baron, *The English-Only Question : An Official Language for Americans*; William Riley Parker and U.S. National Commission for UNESCO, *The National Interest and Foreign Languages*, 3rd ed., Department of State. Publication 7324. International Organization and Conference Series (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961). P. 85.

xenophobia of the rest of the nation that extended to language learning. Alatis's ability to continue his learning in Spanish suggests once again that he exercised agency during this time by engaging with languages.

Alatis's memories often involved examples of how people used words. He recalls the way members of his family would speak English:

Alatis: So that business of wanting to help people learn English and seeing how they were suffering... I don't know if I've told you this story about my father in law who would get on the, he got through this country with hardly any English at all. But he is a businessman, he was a dry cleaner⁶⁶. And he became very successful. But his son Nick was also in the business with him, so he would get home and he would call the store and say, 'Hello, this the Bill. The Nick there?'

C: Mm.

A: Hello, this is Bill. The Greeks use the article in the evocative.

C: Right.

A: The Bill. And if the Nick was not there, he would hang up. Do you hear people say, 'Good morning everybundy?' Substituting the Greek pronunciations of vowels and consonants. And it just so fascinated me that and, and of course I knew that... English was the road to success.

C: Right.

A: And I used to spend a lot of time in the library looking up words in the dictionary. And I particularly would look at words that are of Greek origin.

C: Yeah.

A: And I would occasionally say, 'That's a Greek word.' You know, and people would say, 'This Jim Alatis. He's smart, he has a great vocabulary.' But they didn't know that it was because I was combining the Greek with the English. And I've told you this story about how I was a hospital corpsman in the Navy...

C: Mm-hmm.

⁶⁶ Penelope Alatis amended Dr. Alatis's categorization later, specifying that her father was a tailor.

A: And the docs all thought I was a genius because I knew what all these terms meant because of the Greek... its funny now that I think about it that subliminal feeling that English, and especially good English, would be something that I would be judged by and I was therefore interested in learning English. As well as I could and therefore and also to help people who didn't know English to learn. And then I came into the field of linguistics, and it turns out that linguistics was a very important, played an important role in the professionalization of the learning and teaching of English to non-standard speakers. And non-English speakers.⁶⁷

Alatis's memories, with their examples of linguistics, evidence that an early interest in language through exposure to both Greek and English planted the seeds for his later academic interests. The story reveals that his passion for ESL stems from personal experiences in his community. Greeks, despite their aptitude for business, could be held back by poor English language skills. Alatis attributes his own success to his knowledge of English, although his story makes clear that the Greek education his community provided him gave him additional tools for success in the Anglophone United States.

Alatis graduated high school in 1944, and entered West Virginia University. At the time, because of the draft, many young men were encouraged to pursue engineering.

So I ended up an engineering major that first semester. Now that's relevant only because most of the people of my age ended up in the Army. But the Navy at that time was looking for people who could do radar and sonar. And the idea was, that anybody who had math background and so on could become one of those people. So when they decided where to put me, they put me in the Navy, on the hopes that I would end up being a sonar specialist and so on. I went to college the first semester and in the middle of that semester, of course, in December, I was drafted into the Navy.⁶⁸

He worked in a variety of places, from the Great Lakes Naval Station to the Chelsea Naval Hospital in Massachusetts. The war ended, and benefiting from the G.I. Bill, Alatis

⁶⁷ Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. April 28, 2009.

⁶⁸ Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. March 5, 2009.

returned to West Virginia University to complete his degree in Political Science and English in 1948.

After his undergraduate work, Alatis struggled with his next steps. He briefly attended law school, which he was encouraged to do by his family and the officers administering the GI Bill. After a semester, he decided that Harvard Law was not right for him.

You had to go to the representative of the... Veteran's Administration before you were going to change your major and so on. And so I went to the man, and I was given the test... I went to the man, he looked at the results, and he says, "Young man," he says, "you can study anything you want. But we would recommend law." And that shows you the value of tests.⁶⁹

Alatis found his way to Ohio State University to continue his graduate studies in a different direction.

So I went to Ohio State, and I entered the English Department there. And went on, got my master's degree, and then my master's thesis on the Americanization of Greek Names. They would not let me use Greek for anything else. I couldn't use it as one of my languages, I had, I had Spanish and I had Greek but no they wanted French, or German in, in those days.⁷⁰

Although fluent in Greek, French or German was required of students to complete their degree in English. Alatis's experience with languages while studying for his master's degree demonstrates the landscape of foreign language education policy during the period immediately following the Second World War. He completed his master's degree in 1953, one year after the Modern Language Association had formed the Foreign Language Program, an effort to collect data on foreign language education and expand the teaching

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

of languages.⁷¹ Less commonly taught languages such as Modern Greek had yet to take hold in academics. They would later become increasingly important when Congress passed the National Defense Education Act in 1958.

Alatis did find a way to work the language of his childhood community into his academic work.

*When I did my master's thesis it was my first publication. It was published in Names, the American Name Society's journal, that was my first publication. And then, I was taken under the wing of a professor Francis Lee Utley. He had fun with that acronym. He called himself FLU. Francis Lee Utley. And he's the guy that got me started with the American Name Society, and how I got the grant that is the article published.*⁷²

Alatis used Modern Greek to explore the topic of the Americanization of Greek Names, a topic he knew well. At birth, Alatis recounts

My name was really Demetrius. Because Greek names were so polysyllabic, the custom often was they would shorten them and most Demetriuses became 'Jim' ... One of my teachers said, 'What is this, 'Jim'? Bright young man like you might become President of the United States one of these days, can't go around with a name like Jim. Whoever heard of a Jim or a Jimmy in the White House.

Mrs. Alatis continues the story, "So his name officially kind of became James, E for his father's name Efstathios, Alatis."⁷³ Mrs. Alatis's use of "officially kind of" to describe the transformation of Dr. Alatis's name highlights the fluidity of the Greek names at the time. Names became adapted to fit better into the English language for convenience.

Preservation of heritage was secondary.

⁷¹ Kenneth W. Mildener, "The FL Program, 1952-58: Report and Evaluation," *PMLA* Vol. 74, no. 2 (1959). The Modern Language Association had advocated for the teaching of modern languages since 1883, contrasting modern languages with classical languages, Greek and Latin. This effort focused primarily on teaching the commonly taught modern languages, French, German, and Spanish.

⁷² Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. March 5, 2009.

⁷³ James E. Alatis and Penelope M. Alatis. Interview with Nicole M. Coomber. Digital recording. Washington, DC, August 9, 2011.

Alatis wrote about this subject extensively in his master's thesis. He writes,

When the first Greek immigrants began to trickle into the United States, about the first thing that impressed them, or rather, was impressed upon them, was the fact that their names were entirely too long to suit the efficiency of literary and spoken American-English... A constant pressure was exerted upon them by social, economic, and political forces to change their names to something more easily pronounceable, easier to write, and short enough to accommodate the business machines which made out their paychecks. Thus, the Greek immigrant found himself torn between his deeply ingrained theories of national and family tradition, and the desire to adjust and "belong" to the new and strange society by which he was now surrounded.⁷⁴

As he does in his own stories, Alatis depicts a group of people torn between their tradition and their new, adopted homeland. While many had dreams of returning to Greece, most wanted – and needed – to succeed in the United States in order to survive. Alatis's decision to use the language of his community in his academic work was a way of utilizing his heritage to succeed in the United States. He exercised agency by occupying a linguistic borderland territory, exposing it to others through teaching and research.

Alatis's Greek background paved the way for more than his studies. In the spring of 1950 at a Greek wedding in Youngstown, Ohio, he met Penelope Mastorides. He learned that she was coming to Ohio State that summer for some of her graduate work. For that reason, he decided that he would dance with all the other Greek young ladies at the wedding but not with Penelope. When I asked why in a conversation with Dr. Alatis and Mrs. Alatis, she replied, "He thought he would spend time with me when I came to [Columbus] and I thought in my mind, 'Like heck we are.' You know, he ignored me the

⁷⁴ James E. Alatis, "The Americanization of Greek Names," *Names: The Journal of the American Name Society* III, no. 3 (September 1955).

whole time.”⁷⁵ They met again at a Columbus coffee shop when Penelope came to Ohio State for her studies, and went to an Italian restaurant and then bowling. Dr. Alatis wrote in a brief summary of their meeting, “Mrs. Alatis wants you to know that she insisted on paying for her own dinner on our first official date. I also took her bowling, and much to my chagrin, she beat me at it. Bowling remains one of her passions even today.”⁷⁶ Alatis continues the tale of their courtship and marriage:

In July I returned to Weirton to work until the end of the summer, and Penny returned to Youngstown where she taught during the school year of 1950-51. A series of long-distance calls from Columbus to Youngstown ensued over the year, along with numerous weekend visits to Youngstown in my used, beat-up Dodge.

The following summer, 1951, Penny came back to Columbus to work on her Master’s. We continued our relationship, and I proposed marriage to her. When she agreed, I went to Youngstown to ask her father for her hand in marriage. Her father was impressed by the fact that I spoke Greek, and he immediately wanted to know what I would be doing to earn a living. I replied that I had been given a fellowship in the English Department and that I intended to go on for my PhD, to end up with a doctorate in Linguistics and become a professor.

The couple married on December 30, 1951 in Penelope’s hometown just outside Youngstown, Ohio.

Greek customs played a role in several aspects of the Alatis’s courtship and marriage. The Greek idea of the dowry played a role in the Alatis’s marriage just as it had for his parents. Alatis referred to the passage above, where Mr. Mastorides is concerned about his ability to support Penelope.

Alatis: There’s some implications of the dowry system there. It’s not explicitly pointed out.

Mrs. Alatis: I did not have a dowry. I worked my way through... so I contributed to our marriage.

⁷⁵ Alatis and Alatis. Interview with Nicole M. Coomber. August 9, 2011.

⁷⁶ James E. Alatis, "How I Met Mrs. Alatis and the Aftermath," (2011).

Alatis: The point there is that uh, the dowry system had already been abolished in Greece, and in the United States, people were not expected really to provide a dowry. But it was in the background, the thought that maybe, I might be asking for a dowry. But I never did.

The lack of dowry, and their discussion of the concept, underscores the Alatises' place as second-generation immigrants, influenced by the ideas of their heritage culture but not necessarily beholden to them. Another example of their reinterpretation of Greek traditions appeared in naming their sons. The Greek custom was to name the first son after the paternal grandfather; for the Alatises first son, born in 1952,

He was baptized Vasilios in the Greek Church, named after Penelope's father. Traditionally the first son would have been typically named after the husband's father, and he would receive the father's name as his middle name. But as my older brother had already had a son he'd named Efstathios (Stathis), and since Penelope's brother then showed no signs of settling down any time soon, to pass his father's name on, we named Bill in honor of her father, Mr. Bill (Vasilios) Mastorides.⁷⁷

Mrs. Alatis describes the implications of the traditions in her own family:

Mrs. Alatis: Their middle name (referring to her sons) is the father's name. So all of my sons are like William, Bill, James, Stephen James Alatis, and Anthony James Alatis... So they take the father's... and that's a way of putting people where they belong as far as families are concerned, because... I'll just give you this anecdote. Did you see the Big Fat Greek Wedding?

Coomber: Yes.

Alatis: Movie? Ok, remember when the young man went in and he met, what's your name? Nick. What's your name? Nick? What's your name? Nick. What's your name? Nick... And that really happened to Dr. Alatis, because my grandfather's name, my father's... name, was Nicholas, and so the first child's named after the grandson, [correcting herself] you know, after the grandfather... My brother's name was Nicholas, named after my grandfather. And all of my cousins, there were five brothers, my father and four brothers, lived in the same town. They all had a son. They all were married, and all of their first sons were named Nicholas. So really, when Dr. Alatis came to our house to meet and met all my, 'What's your name? Nick. What's your name? Nick. What's your name? Nick. [Laughing] I actually have five cousins whose

⁷⁷ Ibid.

*names were, you know, Nick. And what identified them was the middle name, which was their father's name... My brother's name was Nicholas Bill, for Basil, Mastorides. My other cousins, uh, Bill Aris, his father's name was Aristotle. So that's a way of identifying you know, what part of a clan a child is.*⁷⁸

Naming served as an important way of connecting past and future within a family. Alatis writes about the idea in his master's thesis as a tradition of Greek-Americans, "Among the Greeks in America, the middle name is usually adopted as a means of differentiating cousins who are all named after the same paternal grandparent and therefore have the same first and last names."⁷⁹

Alatis's academic studies wedded his interest in the inner workings of languages, a passion which grew out of his linguistic experiences in the Greek community to the academic field of linguistics. Following his marriage in 1951, Mrs. Alatis taught while he continued his studies at Ohio State. After completing his master's degree in 1953, he continued his studies for the PhD in English Linguistics at Ohio State and supported his family working as a graduate assistant.⁸⁰ In 1955 he was awarded an American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship to the University of Michigan Summer Linguistics Institute. The summer institute was formative for him, and he said of the experience, "I just ate that stuff up. I took three courses on a regular basis, and I took three, I audited three courses." He points out his academic prowess as well, stating, "I made straight A's."⁸¹ While at Michigan, Alatis made connections with several important linguists who were important in his later career. His connection with Bernard Bloch, in particular, helped him become a Fulbright Scholar.

⁷⁸ Alatis and Alatis. Interview with Nicole M. Coomber. August 9, 2011.

⁷⁹ Alatis, "The Americanization of Greek Names."

⁸⁰ Please see Appendix I for a complete chronology of Alatis's education and career.

⁸¹ Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. March 5, 2009.

Alatis recounted the story of how his ACLS fellowship led to a Fulbright grant for Greece several times.

I had been given an ACLS fellowship to go study linguistics at the University of Michigan... That's where Lado was, and Fries, and... so on. And for that summer, Dr. Bernard Bloch who was the Executive Secretary Treasurer of the Linguistic Society of America and therefore on all the committees was my mentor, my advisor. So I went to say goodbye to him as I was leaving, I made straight A's of course. I took three courses on the registration, but three others I audited. I was really eating that stuff up. And so he said, why don't you apply for a Fulbright grant? I said, nobody wants me to go on a Fulbright grant, I only have a Master's degree. He says, you'd be a lead pipe cinch. I said, will you write me a recommendation? He says, I can't do that. I'm on all the committees. So, that's how we got, how we got to Greece.⁸²

Alatis recounted the same tale of how he came to receive a Fulbright grant a couple more times, always using the same language to describe the conversation between him and Bernard Bloch. Each time, he emphasizes his doubt that he could receive such an honor, and each time he attributes his success at receiving a grant to mentorship by Bernard Bloch. Alatis also uses the same phrase that Bloch used to encourage him in each story, “You’d be a lead pipe cinch!” The use of the term “lead pipe cinch” each time stands out. The term “lead pipe cinch” is an American colloquial term, used “to denote a complete certainty.”⁸³ Origins of this expression are unclear, besides its origins in American slang. Some suggest that the term comes from plumbing, using a lead pipes and “cinching” them to make critical junctures.⁸⁴ Michael Quinion suggest origins in horsing, and point out that the term originated in the late 19th or early 20th centuries, when “everyone who

⁸² Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. February 26, 2009.

⁸³ "Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. lead-pipe,"

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/106618?rskey=Teyc0y&result=1&isAdvanced=true#eid39545148>.

⁸⁴ "Building, Buying A Farm, Feckless and Gormless, Lead Pipes Redux, P.O.S.H. (not), and the Impossibility of Idaho," <http://www.word-detective.com/back-e.html#leadpipe>.

used the phrase knew exactly what a cinch was in its literal sense.”⁸⁵ Quinion points out that “lead pipe” is an intensifier for cinch. Alatis’s use of this phrase which is wholly American and practical, points to his own origins in West Virginia. He may be of Greek origin, but he is also West Virginian born and raised. The earthy phrase, used in this academic context, underscores Alatis’s humble origins in a steel town in “West by God Virginia,” which contrasts with the world of academia he was now joining with the mentorship of great academics like Bernard Bloch.

Alatis received the Fulbright grant, and took his wife and son Bill to Athens. He refers to this time as his “two marvelous years,” when he was able to teach and do research in Greece. In an initial draft of my work, I wrote that Alatis “returned” to Greece for his Fulbright. He took issue with my term, and said, “I was never there,” and emphasized his American birth. In subsequent conversation, we discussed the discrepancy.

Alatis: I guess a sense of a wanderlust, I guess I always did want to go back to to Greece... And so I got the Fulbright and went to Greece... it was exciting for me to see the differences between the cultures as reflected in the language and their customs as well.

Coomber: You said that, before, you always wanted to go back to Greece. And I think that's a really important idea.

A: Well, ok. At home...We were always regaled with stories of the old country... How the sky was bluer, and the sea was bluer and deeper, and how everything was wonderful. In Greek, in Greece. And my teachers would tell me about the history of Greece, and the ancient Greeks and the Odyssey and the, and the Iliad and the Greek tragedies, and they built great expectations in my mind for what Greece was all about. And that's what I mean when I say, I would like to go and, and go back to my roots... And so I guess there was this quest for identity. And

⁸⁵ Michael Quinion, "World Wide Words," <http://www.worldwidewords.org/qa/qa-lea2.htm>.

*well, there was just, it was a good thing. It was a great honor to be given a Fulbright, even though I didn't have my PhD... So I didn't mean really go back. To go back to the land of my ancestors is what I guess...*⁸⁶

Appadurai's concept of *transnation* to portray the American migration of Greeks as part of the greater Hellenic diaspora appears here in Alatis's sense of connection and disconnection to his "homeland," which is truly the homeland of his ancestors.⁸⁷ The Greek longing for a homeland, which Alatis experienced as a young boy helping his father sell Greek newspapers, made the trip to Greece appealing. Longing for the homeland and a desire for connection with the long and celebrated history of Greece marks the Greek migrant experience. Laliotou links the "Great Idea" of recreating a Greek homeland from the far-flung outposts spread across the former empire to the Hellenic diaspora. This foreign policy choice encouraged the continued diaspora as one day many of these communities might once again become part of the Greek nation-state.⁸⁸

During Alatis's Fulbright experience, his linguistic ability allowed him to become a border crosser. His ability to serve as a translator marked him as something more than an American, as he relates in his tale of arriving in Greece with his fellow Fulbright scholars.

The minute we arrived in Greece, there was a strike in Athens over the atrocities that had been created and performed in, in Turkey and Constantinople where a lot of Greek descendants had been terrorized. And that was the beginning of a problem. The, of course, I was among the 12 or so Fulbrighters that were going to Greece and suddenly I became their interpreter and translator. And I would help

⁸⁶ Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. April 28, 2009.

⁸⁷ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 172-173; Laliotou, *Transatlantic Subjects : Acts of Migration and Cultures of Transnationalism Between Greece and America*. 4-17.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 54-55.

*them get through customs, and they would, [they] looked at them and said, 'Who's this?' [I replied], 'It's an American professor.' 'Ok, let 'em go.' [Then they said to me], 'Now it's your turn. Open up everything! You're a Greek! You're one of us!' You know, you are clever, and you're doing something.*⁸⁹

Despite being counted as a Greek in some situations, others demonstrate that Alatis was also not fully Greek. His six years of Greek school gave him an understanding of the language but with a limited vocabulary, and what Alatis termed “the language contact situation” meant his Greek was influenced by English. Greek immigrants encountered new concepts which had no words in their rural Greek, so “*automobile* became *atmobily*⁹⁰, *bank* became *banka*, *basket* became *basketta*, *bill of fare* became *billoferry*, *carpet* became *carpeto*, and so on.”⁹¹ Alatis elaborates, “Roof became *to roofi*, and floor became *to floori*.”⁹² The language contact situation distinguishes Greek Americans both from Greeks and from Americans, creating a borderland language understood only within the confines of the Greek-American community. The trope of Alatis-as-translator appears here as it did in his youth, even if he is an imperfect one. His role as translator gives him a special status within his group of peers.

Alatis became more aware of the hybridization of his Greek when he traveled to Athens for his Fulbright work. He arrived with a group of American professors also part of the Fulbright group and served as a translator. During their first time in a restaurant, he translated effectively throughout the meal. When it came time to ask for the check, he says, “my American Greek came in and I said, *Tobily parakalo*. The bill. *Tochecki parakalo*. [*The check.*] Nothing. Professor Harry Levy, who was a classist from Hunter

⁸⁹ Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. February 26, 2009.

⁹⁰ Alatis later commented that “*caro*” was another Americanized Greek word for automobile.

⁹¹ Scourby, *The Greek Americans*. 75.

⁹² Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. February 26, 2009.

College... had been studying a Greek village, Vasilika... And he of course had read the... right behind you - those three blue books, you see them?"⁹³ Alatis gestured to several books in his office. They were Army resources for English to Greek translation, along with other languages. His colleague knew how to request the check in proper Greek from those resources, whereas Alatis's language from the Greek-American school had taught him a hybrid version of the word.

Alatis encountered additional experiences in Greece that underscored, for him, the importance of language to success in life. For immigrants in Weirton, West Virginia, Alatis said the mantra was "assimilate or starve," and assimilate meant learning English.⁹⁴ In Greece, one's level of language could open or close doors within society. Alatis wrote about the concept of "diglossia" he experienced in Greece, which meant that different varieties of Greek were used in different situations and in different social settings. During his time in Athens, he went on one occasion to pick up a new telephone directory at the bank. He writes, "I found myself part of a large group of Greeks staring up at a proclamation, which was written in *Katharevousa* ("pure" Greek.) An elderly lady turned to me and, in a heavy regional accent, asked, "What does that proclamation say?" I couldn't tell her."⁹⁵ He went in to ask at the bank, claiming ignorance due to his Greek-American language, and the teller told him what the pure Greek said. He then translated for the rest of the group who had gathered outside. His experience in Greece as well as his experience as a son of immigrants underscored the power of language to open doors and create opportunities, not only in the United States but in Greece. Alatis summed up

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. April 28, 2009.

⁹⁵ "Two Marvelous Years: A Quest for Ethnic Identity," *Logos* 2003.

the experience by calling it a “lesson in the power of language as a means of democratic communication, which I understand is still a problem in Greece.”⁹⁶

The Alatises spent a second year in Greece on a Fulbright fellowship, which was an unusual honor in that day. Mrs. Alatis wanted to spend a third, but said “Dr. Alatis was anxious to return and finish his dissertation.”⁹⁷ The family returned to Ohio where Alatis continued his studies for the doctorate. The impending arrival of another son changed their family situation again.

We returned to Columbus at the end of the summer of 1957, and decided that Penny and Bill would live with her parents in the Youngstown suburb of Campbell. Penny would teach in that area, while I continued my doctoral coursework and commuted to Youngstown on the weekends and holidays.

That December our second son Stephen (who was then baptized Efstathios in the Greek Church) was born in Youngstown, and I was also awarded my Master's in December of 1957. Mrs. Alatis taught high school in 1958 and 1959 while her mother and father looked after Bill and Stephen during the day.⁹⁸

Alatis continued to work as a teaching assistant in English while working on his studies. In 1959, he received a phone call from a contact in the Department of State offering him a job working as an English Teaching and Testing Specialist for the Department of State. The Alatises moved to Washington, D.C. in 1959 for this new position, and a new chapter in their lives commenced.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 6.

⁹⁷ Alatis and Alatis. Interview with Nicole M. Coomber. August 9, 2011.

⁹⁸ Alatis, "How I Met Mrs. Alatis and the Aftermath." There is some discrepancies in the dates that Alatis states he completed his master's degree here. According to his curriculum vitae (see Appendix II), he had been awarded his master's degree in 1953, before he went to Greece on the Fulbright Scholarship. In 1957 he was working on his doctoral degree at the Ohio State University but did not complete it until 1966. The date of 1953 is the correct one for the conferral of his master's degree.

Chapter 4: Alatis in Washington DC at the Sputnik Moment

With a passion for languages and linguistics influencing each step, James E. Alatis had made his way from a Greek immigrant community in Weirton, West Virginia to graduate studies at Ohio State University and a Fulbright scholarship in Athens, Greece. After completing two more years of doctoral work at Ohio State University, a call from the Department of State in 1959 opened the door for a new opportunity for the Alatis family. This period of Alatis's life marks his entry into the language policy world in Washington, DC, and establishes his emergence as a leader in the field. His experience and connections made at the Department of State and Office of Education continue to play an important role in his subsequent leadership of the Georgetown School of Languages and Linguistics.

Mrs. Alatis tells the story about how they came to Washington.

Mrs. Alatis: He was a grad student and had a job teaching, and Jim, you just got a call one day, didn't you?

Dr. Alatis: Yeah, somebody from the State Department called me and offered me a job. And I took it.

Mrs. Alatis: In Washington DC... in the State Department.

The Alatises thought that a friend they had met in Greece, Harry Freeman, had made the connection for them. The position offered was as an English Teaching and Testing Specialist.

Mrs. Alatis: So they offered him this job... and he was at the State Department for a year and a half, and literally he was stolen from them to go to the Office of Education. So he never really went out looking for a job, they went looking for him.

His career in languages began during a transformative era. Alatis describes the time as the “heyday” for languages, saying “57 that the Sputnik went up, 58 the NDEA [National Defense Education Act] was passed, 59 the Alatises came to Washington as well as the Center [of Applied Linguistics].”⁹⁹ Alatis laughed as he included himself as part of the heyday, but his subsequent leadership of TESOL and the Georgetown School of Languages and Linguistics stemmed from being involved in a number of influential efforts in language during what those in the field term “the Sputnik era.”

The “Sputnik era” refers to the 1957 launch of the Russian satellite Sputnik, which initiated a new era of educational reform in the United States. Edwards, Lenker, and Khan explain the significance of the event on their timeline of language education in the U.S.

Until Sputnik was launched, schooling in substantive disciplinary subject area had been a matter of state and local discretion, with virtually no federal involvement. This perceived threat from the Soviet Union provided impetus for the legislation on international education and foreign languages that became the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in the following year (1958). The NDEA originally focused on relatively narrow goals in direct response to the Soviet Union’s accomplishments and the spread of communism.¹⁰⁰

The launch of Sputnik created a policy window that allowed for increased support at the federal level for language education.¹⁰¹ The passage of NDEA provided funding for two primary areas of language education: one, support for the “neglected” or “less commonly taught” languages, and two, support for English as a second or foreign language. Given

⁹⁹ Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. March 5, 2009.

¹⁰⁰ Edwards, Lenker, and Kahn, "National Language Policies: Pragmatism, Process, and Products."

¹⁰¹ For more on policy windows, see John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies*, 2nd ed. (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1995).

Alatis's background in Modern Greek, a less commonly taught language, and in English linguistics, he became a prime candidate to lead a number of efforts in these areas.

Alatis himself has a somewhat cynical view of the impetus for the passage of NDEA. During our interviews, he commented on several occasions that only a "crisis" could have created such a large effort on behalf of the languages.

Underlying all this that I'm going to say to you is based upon the anomaly in this country with regard to any kind of thing, and somebody once said to me, you Americans never do anything unless there's a crisis. So the first crisis was of course ... World War II, and we had decided that we ought [to] have Americans learn other languages, either for friends or for our enemies, and so, a lot of people, especially under the GI Bill, came in and began to study, we had the GI Bill on the one hand, and then we had... the Uncommonly Taught Languages, specifically, everybody in this country was studying Spanish, or French. But none of the so-called uncommonly taught languages. And so I became, the specialist for language research for the so-called uncommonly taught languages of Greek, of which Greek was one.¹⁰²

While Alatis cynically states that only a crisis could create NDEA, he also often expresses the hopeful notion that increased study in foreign language sows the seeds for peace. Although he sometimes downplays his own role in the transformations that took place during this era, his philosophy on promoting language teaching influenced and was influenced by these transformational times for language teaching and learning. Within this new political structure of NDEA, Alatis finds his way of exercising agency, through his involvement in less commonly taught languages and in linguistics.

Alatis's assessment that he arrived in Washington, DC during the heyday for languages is apt, as the early 1960s marked a period of intense focus on the importance of languages at the federal level. The focus was remarkable because it represented a change

¹⁰² Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. February 26, 2009.

in policy, and was the first time neglected languages became a predominant focus of the federal government. The language learning landscape had shifted a few times since the beginning of the century. The turn of the century saw a period of increased language instruction due to Spanish- and German-speaking immigrants and their children. That era was followed by xenophobia in the wake of World War I period and ushered in a return to focusing on English in state and national education policy.¹ Languages other than English had been maintained primarily through community efforts in places such as Alatis's hometown of Weirton through community schools, radio, and newspapers in the 1920s.¹⁰³ On the state and national level, language study was at a low point. President Woodrow Wilson created a national director of Americanization, and between 1918 and 1919, 24 states created or strengthened laws that made it criminal to teach bilingual education.¹⁰⁴ The tide began to shift in the mid-1920's, however, as the Modern Language Association studied language learning in the 1924 Coleman Report. World War II and the growing influence of the United States in the rest of the world exposed both the lack of training in languages for Americans, and the need to export English language learning around the world.¹⁰⁵

Efforts to increase the amount of language training began slowly in different settings. At the federal level, Congress passed the Fulbright-Hays Act in 1946, nine years before Alatis benefited from the program to teach at the University of Athens. The

¹⁰³ Fishman, *Language loyalty in the United States; the maintenance and perpetuation of non-English mother tongues by American ethnic and religious groups*.

¹⁰⁴ Carlos Kevin Blanton, "The Rise of English-Only Pedagogy: Immigrant Children, Progressive Education, and Language Policy in the United States, 1900-1930," in *When Science Encounters the Child: Education, Parenting, and Child Welfare in 20th-Century America*, ed. Barbara Beatty, Emily D. Cahan, and Julia Grant, *Reflective History Series* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2006). 68.

¹⁰⁵ Parker and UNESCO, *The National Interest and Foreign Languages*; John Brademas, "Foreign languages and federal aid to education," *PMLA* Vol. 77, no. 2 (1962).

Fulbright-Hays Act was the first indication of a coming movement that more and better education in languages was needed. Within the profession of language educators, the Modern Language Association formed the Foreign Language Program in 1952 to collect data on language education and expand the teaching of languages. Many have cited the work done by this program as influential upon the ultimate passage of the NDEA.¹⁰⁶ Robert G. Mead Jr., a Spanish Professor at the University of Connecticut who worked with MLA, stated about the MLA program, “Let it be said at the outset that the improvement in the situation of foreign languages since the 1950s is due largely to the direct contributions and the indirect effects of the MLA's efforts to upgrade the teaching of these languages and to publicize their values to the national interest.” Modern historians of the foreign language education profession also characterize the early efforts as “planting the seeds” for reform.¹⁰⁷

Alatis and I discussed Mead’s article on the MLA, and he noted, “It is a seminal article. I’m glad you found that.”¹⁰⁸ His admiration for William Riley Parker, who was significant in leading the MLA efforts in the Foreign Language Program, has come up many times in our conversations. Parker’s book, *The National Interest in Foreign Languages*, is cited as being the “legislator’s bible” for creating the language title (Title VI) of NDEA.¹⁰⁹ Alatis says, in reference to his work with both the Office of Education

¹⁰⁶ Richard T. Thompson, "Twenty Years After Parker: Past, Present and Future for the Foreign Language Profession," *ADFL Bulletin* 4, no. 4 (1973); Mildenerger, "The FL Program, 1952-58: Report and Evaluation."; Lawrence G. Derthick, "The Purpose and Legislative History of the Foreign Language Titles in the National Defense Education Act, 1958," *PMLA* 74, no. 2 (1959); Parker and UNESCO, *The National Interest and Foreign Languages*.

¹⁰⁷ Hancock and Scebold, "Defining Moments in Foreign and Second-Language Education During the Last Half of the Twentieth Century."

¹⁰⁸ James E. Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. Digital recording. Washington, DC, September 29, 2011.

¹⁰⁹ Derthick, "The Purpose and Legislative History of the Foreign Language Titles in the National Defense Education Act, 1958."

and TESOL, “Well, the two people that I was influenced most by were people from Modern Language Association, specifically Ken Mildenberger who came to Washington after the NDEA was passed to administer it, and he became my boss. He recruited me to the Office of Education.” The other influential figure for Alatis was William Riley Parker, who “was famous for his book on *The National Interest in the Foreign Languages* and his work is something that really everybody should read right from the beginning.”¹¹⁰ The MLA was an important and influential organization on Alatis’s work at the Office of Education, and later in his design of the TESOL professional organization.

Alatis notes that many organizations were involved in this wave of action for the languages, including the American Council on Learned Societies (ACLS). Alatis benefited from ACLS efforts to promote languages and linguistics during graduate school, when he received a fellowship for an ACLS Summer Institute at the University of Michigan. He says, “The ACLS being given money by Rockefeller, the MLA being given money by Ford, and they all sync together like it's not quite serendipity, but there were a lot of things happening at the same time.”¹¹¹ Parker writes about some of these efforts in his 1954 article about the MLA Foreign Language Program, stating “Thanks to a Ford Foundation grant of a quarter of a million dollars, the ACLS is in the second year of a three-year program to provide Americans with the tools with which they can learn the most important languages of Asia.”¹¹² For Alatis, the ACLS, and Parker and

¹¹⁰ James E. Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. Digital recording. Washington, DC, June 20, 2011.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Parker and UNESCO, *The National Interest and Foreign Languages*.

Mildenberger at the MLA paved the way for the passage of the NDEA and the work Alatis did first at the Department of State and then Office of Education.

Alatis's focus at the Department of State was on English language testing. One notable accomplishment in this role was his involvement in creating the test that would later become the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). The teaching of English was an important priority for the NDEA. Alatis describes his recollection of Ambassador George V. Allen, ambassador to Greece from 1956-1957, and his testimony before Congress.¹¹³

And there was a guy who had been the ambassador... of the US in Greece who I knew and his name was George Venable Allen. And he was being questioned by the Congress and said, if you had say, 50 million dollars at that time, what would you do with it? No question, he says, I would put it in the teaching of English as a foreign language.¹¹⁴

One challenge facing the teaching of English as second and foreign language was the lack of a single test for establishing proficiency. Alatis describes how the test was created.

*There was no universally accepted test for the foreign students coming into the United States to be admitted with some kind of competence in English. And so, a man from the Ford Foundation came to me in the State Department and said, "You mean there's no one test for everybody?" I said, "No. No money."... This man's name was Mel Fox, Ford Foundation. He said, "We should have a conference on the subject." And we had a conference, and there came out of it a publication called *Testing the English Proficiency of Foreign Language Students*. .. And I had the lead article in that, and I told them about what we were doing in the State Department, we had only an oral rating sheet which was very subjective... We had a meeting that we ought to have a test. So the Ford Foundation funded the first version of the TOEFL test. And David Harris was seconded as it were from Georgetown to go to the Center for Applied Linguistics and start doing the TOEFL test.¹¹⁵*

¹¹³ "George Venable Allen (1903-1970)," <http://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/allen-george-venable>.

¹¹⁴ Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. March 5, 2009.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Charles A. Ferguson, founder and first director of the Center for Applied Linguistics, led the effort to create TOEFL. Eventually the Educational Testing Service took over administration of the test, and the TOEFL continues today as the recognized way for foreign students to prove their competency in English.¹¹⁶

As Mrs. Alatis indicated above, after a year and a half at the Department of State the Office of Education tapped Alatis to work for them in the Language Research section. In this position, Alatis worked with a number of figures important to the field of language education. His primary responsibilities were funding research, especially the creation of materials for the teaching of neglected languages.

Kenneth Mildenberger... offered me a job as a specialist in language research with specific reference to the uncommonly taught languages. And then, in a year or so, I became the chief of the whole research section from which the, the commissioner was authorized by director or by contract to prepare studies for the increasing improvement of foreign language and the areas so called that they were representing. And I was in the research section, there were the fellowships, there were institutes and there were centers and I stayed with them although whenever the big applications would come in in large numbers all of us got together and we helped read those applications and so I was interested in uncommonly taught languages from the beginning.¹¹⁷

Alatis used a collaborative approach in the creation of materials in the neglected languages. He approached centers and associations to identify talented academics in neglected languages to create what he terms “the basic tools of access.” In several interviews, he noted a variety of materials on his shelf that both inspired these materials, such as grammars created for usage in the armed forces, as well as resources created through grants he supervised.

¹¹⁶ Bernard Spolsky, *Measured Words : the Development of Objective Language Testing*, Oxford Applied Linguistics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); "The prehistory of TOEFL," *Language Testing* 7, no. 1 (1990).

¹¹⁷ Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. March 5, 2009.

*English for Greeks, English for Arabs, English for Spaniards, and so forth. And so that was a big movement in those days by the federal government to prepare materials to teach Eng, uh English to foreign students on the one hand and... they used a contrastive analysis of the two languages and also the methodology that was inherited by the, by the language teachers from the linguists and the two came together.*¹¹⁸

Alatis's pride in the creation of these materials was evident, as he referenced them each time we met for an interview. The creation of materials in all the languages of the world often came up as one of his goals for his work in the Office of Education and at Georgetown.

The materials created by the Research Section of the Office of Education with Alatis at the helm addressed a critical need in language learning, especially in the domain of area studies within colleges and universities. Alatis refers to this as the "areas." Alatis describes the need for better language materials and the impact that it had on the outcomes of area studies programs.

*The outstanding weakness in the areas approach by the end of the 1950s was in language instruction. Most languages which are offered were taught with less than optimum effectiveness... owing partly to the scarcity of teachers and partly to the lack of instructional materials. Many important languages were not taught at all. What had been accomplished in the non-western languages had been the work of a few leading scholars starting before World War II... as late as 1958 which is when the bill [NDEA] was passed many students otherwise qualified as area specialists were graduating without language proficiency inadequate for either field work in their areas or satisfactory for library research at home. Nevertheless the vital place of language in area studies had become clearer.*¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. April 28, 2009.

¹¹⁹ Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. Digital recording. Washington, DC, July 23, 2009.

Alatis notes that understanding indigenous languages enhanced the ability for area studies scholars to perform field work in new locales, uncovering knowledge about cultures and lands previously unstudied. Without adequate materials, the study of these languages within U.S. colleges and universities was impossible.

Among the materials Alatis shared with me was *A Provisional Study of Materials for the Study of Neglected Languages*, a list of “basic tools of access for the study of neglected languages” created by the Center of Applied Linguistics as part of a contract with the Office of Education. This anthology of materials for language study underscores Alatis’s vision for language learning that he promoted through the office, a vision shared by the United Nations Parliamentarian’s Conference of 1958 and by the creators of the NDEA, which was the goal of creating learning materials in all the languages of the world. Alatis describes the charge to create these materials and the process by which he accomplished it. He describes being involved in research at the Office of Education:

[It was] basic research leading to the actual publication of materials that were very sorely needed as had been determined by the [United Nations] Parliamentarians' conference in 1958. And it was deliberate. People like me just took the information that they had recommended and built it. The way I did it was I would find the leading associations or consortium of associations and I would follow their lead. And I established a network of organizations to whom I would send proposals for them to read, and then I would take the proposals, work them up a little bit in order to satisfy the accountants in the Office of Education so... they would fund them.¹²⁰

Alatis had an extensive network that aided in this process and he relied upon their expertise. He states, “I had the American council on Arab studies for example, I had the Asian studies people, so I had recruited practically all the important people in the field who gave me objective information as to the quality of proposals.” This network of

¹²⁰ Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. June 20, 2011.

academics allowed Alatis to create quality materials in a number of different languages for the Office of Education. ¹²¹

In his role at the Office of Education, the trope of interpretation as leadership appears. Alatis served as a “translator” between the needs of the government and the academic community. He would identify the needs as expressed in federal legislation, translate them into what was being worked on currently by academics, and find the right academics for the job. In the reverse direction, if academics approached him with grant proposals, he would help “translate” them so they were clearly linked to the goals of the government. His “translation” efforts also helped them craft proposals that met the strict government guidelines for budget requirements.

The effort to create, document, and provide access to resources for teaching languages was central to Alatis’s work. One result of these efforts was the creation of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) under the direction of Charles A Ferguson of Harvard University in 1959. At first funded by a grant from the Ford Foundation, ERIC then came to the MLA as part of their mission for the promotion of the teaching of languages. Two educational clearinghouses were created as part of ERIC under the guidance of Alatis while he was at the Office of Education. Mead describes the clearinghouses in his article on the MLA:

Instrumental in the genesis of ERIC was James E. Alatis, at the time chief of the Language Research Section of the Language Development Program of the NDEA in Washington. Research funds provided under Title VI of the NDEA were earmarked by Alatis for the creation of the first educational clearinghouses belonging to ERIC. Two of the earliest of these had to do with the general field of languages: the Clearinghouse on Teaching Foreign Languages and the Clearinghouse for Linguistics and

¹²¹ Ibid.

*Uncommonly Taught Languages... Today the Educational Resources Information Center is our richest national source of easily accessible information regarding current educational research, developments in instruction, and preparation of personnel.*¹²²

Alatis deemed the creation and cataloguing of materials as seminal: “When I think about it, the research part of it was the most important part... it turns out that in all the things that I did, there was hardly any material regarding the uncommonly taught languages. And so it fell to what existed, what linguists existed in the field to do those. And the basic grammars and stuff like that that had never existed were done there [at the Office of Education].” Alatis’s goal was to create materials that would help teachers and students begin the study of languages. In his vision, Alatis does not distinguish between “neglected” and “commonly taught” languages, rather, he states a more global approach.

But I have been really thinking that we should do materials for all the languages of the world... I wanted there to be contrastive analyses between all the languages of the world leading to materials, scientifically based materials, of all the languages of the world, and we could all live happily ever after.

The last part he says with a bit of a chuckle, but it does represent for him a common theme that came up many times in our interviews, that language learning creates a pathway to better understanding between different peoples.¹²³ These materials represent another form of interpretation; Alatis creating a lasting set of materials that translates research on how students should learn language by linguists into useable material for instructors.

¹²² Robert G. Mead, "The MLA and the Study of Foreign Languages," *PMLA* 99, no. 3 (1984).

¹²³ Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. June 20, 2011.

As essential to the development of materials for language learning, for Alatis, were the pedagogical changes that occurred during the post World War II period. Before the new influx of federal attention and funding, many students still learned languages via the grammar-translation method. Bolstered by the success of the military in training soldiers to speak foreign languages in the Army Specialized Training Program, or the “Army Method,” foreign language educators and linguists began to move away from the grammar translation method to the aural-oral or audio-lingual method.¹²⁴ Linguists such as Alatis began to take a more pronounced role in the discussion over teaching methods.

We were on a big audio-lingual kick, behavioral psychology, and structural linguistics, and we were pushing audiolinguism but we had some research that was done that suggested that audiolinguism wasn't good enough. ...then it became that Chomsky came along, and we moved to cognitive psychology. And to transformational grammar and he himself in 1966 ...[stated he] didn't see how linguistics had anything to do with teaching. And so that threw people in a tizzy, they started to create all kinds of methods, approaches and techniques, and among them these hybrid kinds of things there was total physical response, there was suggestopedia, there was the direct approach, there was a grammar translation, there was reading, there was phonetic approach and so on... So we ... came up with a ... prudent eclecticism, based upon the theories of linguistics as they existed at that time.¹²⁵

The “reformation” in foreign language education pedagogy created a stir and transformed the profession. From the late ‘50s forward, more dialogue opened up about how to teach foreign languages, and linguists, educators, and policy makers still debate the best ways to teach foreign languages.¹²⁶ Alatis believed in using the science of linguistics and the best available research to create sound materials for teaching.

¹²⁴ Kurz, "The Future of Modern Language Teaching."; Parker and UNESCO, *The National Interest and Foreign Languages*; Hancock and Scebold, "Defining Moments in Foreign and Second-Language Education During the Last Half of the Twentieth Century."; Mildenerger, "Recent Developments in Foreign Language Teaching in American Schools and Colleges."

¹²⁵ Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. March 5, 2009.

¹²⁶ Hancock and Scebold, "Defining Moments in Foreign and Second-Language Education During the Last Half of the Twentieth Century."

Alatis's own views reflect the tension in the field. He states that to teach languages effectively, "Everyone should be a linguist." However, language teachers have much to offer the field in creating quality educational experiences. Alatis states, "The whole idea [is to think] of linguistics as a science and being the guidepost for making decisions having to do with quality. I think I went overboard on that for a long time. I assumed if you're not doing linguistics, you're not doing anything worthwhile. But that's a little bit harsh on all the other discipline."¹²⁷ He describes the contributions that language teachers in the classroom made to pedagogy, that their experience teaching in the classroom gave them an understanding of "things that the linguists themselves could never have learned. And so there was a big battle. And there still is a big battle. The other foreign language teachers would argue that the linguists were making false statements about the efficiency of their kind of teaching."¹²⁸ Alatis expresses a collaborative view, that there is room both for the structure and science of linguistics and the observations of teachers in the classroom to create good language pedagogy.

Alatis goes on to highlight differences linguists had within their camp during this time. The revolution of the Army Method teaching began to cede to new viewpoints during the 1960s, and one influential figure was Noam Chomsky. Alatis highlights his disagreement with some of Chomsky's work, then goes on to describe his view of what linguists during this post-war period shared in common.

Alatis: [Chomsky] himself said in 1966 or so, that he saw no connection between linguistics and the teaching of languages.

Coomber: But you disagree.

¹²⁷ Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. June 20, 2011.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Alatis: I didn't agree. But I, he was very kind to me, he spoke at the Round Table, one of the early Round Tables, and I wrote to him and asked him to come again and reprise his original glory and he wrote me a very nice letter and he said well, he's busy. He's very much in demand. And actually a nice man. I think the thing that we have in common is that he's against anything that causes people to kill each other. And I think that's what all the linguists had in mind when they talk about languages and linguistics.

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In Alatis's view, the atrocities of the World Wars had set a common goal for those in linguistics and language teaching. This common view drove the creation of the NDEA and continued to influence a generation of leaders working to promote linguistics and languages. Despite their differences, Alatis comes back time and time again to the description of linguists and language teachers as "patriotic," working to secure peace for the United States.

Alatis's work in English as a Second Language at the Office of Education underscores similar goals. In addition to his work with less commonly taught languages, Alatis continued his work in ESL at the Office of Education. One initiative aimed to teach Cuban immigrants English during the mass emigration from Cuba that occurred after Fidel Castro declared the Cuban government socialist in 1959. As with the passage of NDEA, Alatis notes that a "crisis" predicated the efforts teaching English to Cubans in South Florida.

It had to take a crisis before that we had the Cuban crisis, and we were teaching English to Cubans of military age so that they could go take over Cuba. I'm being cynical about that. But... President Kennedy had a fund of his own that he gave money to me to do, and we went down, and created a program in Dade County and trained these teachers. And not only did we

¹²⁹ Ibid.

*train teachers to teach English, but of course the whole idea of bilingual education came into play.*¹³⁰

These efforts of English language teaching eventually resulted in the Cuban Refugee Program, which was administered during the early 1960s through the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The initial efforts in which Alatis was involved were smaller, and as he told me, “The ‘juicy’ implication is that my program was a covert preparation for the failed Bay of Pigs invasion.”¹³¹ Languages and linguistics thus had a role in the anti-Communist efforts of the United States government. The program later developed into a wider effort to educate Cuban refugees in the aforementioned Cuban Refugee Program. Many of Cuba’s best minds – teachers, doctors, and other professionals – left Cuba when Castro came to power, and the Cuban Refugee Program sought to take advantage of the “brain drain.” For the Office of Education, “Thousands of school teachers [had] escaped from Cuba, and HEW [had] sponsored more than 15 training projects at universities in various parts of the country leading to the employment of Spanish language teachers in hundreds of communities previously not able to located teachers of that skill.”¹³² Additional funds were given to Dade County Schools to facilitate two-way bilingual education programs, which were some of the first in the United States. Alatis’s involvement in these early efforts at English language teaching to refugees and bilingual education demonstrate the breadth of his experience at the Office of Education.

¹³⁰ Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. February 26, 2009.

¹³¹ Email to Nicole M. Coomber, August 30, 2011.

¹³² John F. Thomas, "Cuban Refugees in the United States," *International Migration Review* 1, no. 2 (1967).

The diversity of experience Alatis had at the Office of Education made him well-suited for the next roles he took on in his career at Georgetown University and the professional association Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Before he could take on these new roles, in which he used his education and network developed at the Office of Education to become one of the leaders of the field, Alatis had a little matter to finish at the Ohio State University – his dissertation.

I was an ABD, and it was seven years since I'd left Ohio State. And I had to finish my dissertation or I had to start all over again. So in order to finish my dissertation, I left the Office of Education, took a chance on that. Dr. Lado who was the Dean [of Georgetown's then Institute of Languages and Linguistics] at the time knew that I was leaving the Office of Education and there was a great deal of competition to get my services from all kinds of universities... As a matter of fact, [Dr. Lado] was very kind to me. He offered to pay my salary from April until the following beginning of the semester. And I did that, then my mother died and he extended that for another week or so, and so I got the dissertation in, and became Dr. Alatis because of that.¹³³

Mrs. Alatis tells the story of how Dr. Alatis submitted his dissertation the summer after leaving the Office of Education in 1965. She says of Dr. Lado's offer to bring Dr. Alatis to Georgetown and giving him time to finish his dissertation,

He says, I will put you on the payroll from April to September, so that was in 1965, if you finish, to give you time to finish your dissertation. Which was awesome. Really nice. Very generous. So he put him on the payroll, and... got him in at Georgetown University. And that summer he did write his dissertation...he finished it, and we had somebody who did the professional typing, I did the typing before that. So we worked together with the kids and everything, and I flew, I know we didn't fly in those days really very much, so I flew the two copies of the thesis to Columbus and somebody from the university, Ohio State University, met me at the

¹³³ Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. June 20, 2011.

airport, and I gave them the dissertation. And I, "Oh my gosh, if this plane goes down," I wasn't thinking of myself, I was thinking of the darn paper that I had, the dissertation, you know, so I said, "Oh my gosh, if I go down with the plane, that's going to go down too." But I came back that same night, I flew back, but this nice lady met me, and she took the dissertation, and she said, 'You can go back and call your husband Dr. Alatis.'"¹³⁴

The family returned to Columbus, Ohio at the end of the summer for commencement.

Despite his extensive study and hard work building materials and programs for languages at the Office of Education, the credential was essential for Alatis to take on the roles that would allow him to become a leader in the field of languages and linguistics.

Alatis began his post-doctoral career at Georgetown University's School of Languages and Linguistics¹³⁵ as Associate Dean and Associate Professor of Modern Greek. His first year at Georgetown, Harold Allen, Edward Anthony and Charles Ferguson approached him to become the executive director of a nascent organization for teachers of English to speakers of other languages, called TESOL.¹³⁶ The arrangement became that he would spend two-thirds of his time as Associate Dean and one-third of his time with TESOL. For many, Alatis's contributions to the field of language education are most recognizable through TESOL. However, Alatis himself eschews the title "Father of TESOL," ascribing it instead to Harold Byron Allen. In a tribute to Allen upon his death, Alatis wrote,

Considering Harold's role in the early history of TESOL, I must point out that, while some people have referred to me as the 'father of TESOL', that appellation

¹³⁴ Interview with Dr. Alatis and Mrs. Alatis,

¹³⁵ The School of Languages and Linguistics was originally called the Institute of Languages and Linguistics and was part of the School of Foreign Service. It became the SLL in 1961 under Robert Lado's leadership. "In Memoriam: Robert Lado, Dean (1961-1973)," <http://www2.gsu.edu/~eslnxj/8250/lado.html>.

¹³⁶ "ELT Pioneer with a Truly Global Vision: James Alatis, First Executive Director of TESOL," *EL Gazette* October 1996.

more rightly belongs to Harold Allen... My organizational cooperation with Harold began right after the founding of TESOL in 1966 when, as its first president, he invited me to become its first executive secretary. It should be emphasized that the creation of this association was the culmination of more than four years of planning concerning the teaching of English to speakers of other languages.

Allen had created a report, A Survey of the Teaching of English to Non-English Speakers in the United States, or the TENES Survey, in April 1964 that was instrumental in moving the profession forward towards the creation of an association. Despite Alatis's humility, he also played a role in the TENES survey since it was funded under an Office of Education contract.¹³⁷ Alatis, as Executive Director, was responsible for getting the organization off the ground. He describes the early days:

[Dr. Lado, Dean of the School of Languages and Linguistics] gave me a little shoebox for, of an office and a secretary to be associate dean and also then to be executive director of TESOL. And that's how that came about. So I had essentially two jobs, probably three jobs, and when we had three ad-hoc conferences at which people were milling, mulling around with the idea of creating an organization.¹³⁸

The initial conference, held in Tucson, Arizona on May 8 and 9, 1964, was sponsored by five different organizations involved in language education. They were the National Council of the Teachers of English (NCTE), the National Association of Foreign Student Advisors (NAFSA), Speech Association of America, Modern Language Association (MLA), and the Center for Applied Linguistics. The second conference was in 1965 in San Diego, and the third in New York in 1966. These conferences provided the initial 337 charter members, and the organization grew from those initial meetings.

¹³⁷ "NCTE and English as a Second Language,"
<http://www.library.illinois.edu/archives/ncte/about/august.php>.

¹³⁸ Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. February 26, 2009.

Alatis has written extensively on the history of TESOL in a number of articles and in a book titled *Quest for Quality: The First Twenty-One Years of TESOL*. Here I am more interested in Alatis's vision for founding the organization, although he is a walking encyclopedia of knowledge about TESOL's history. He can cite from memory the number of initial members – 337 – and the number of members when he left as Executive Director in 1986 – 11,000. When asked about how he created the organization, he replied,

*I modeled TESOL on other organizations that had existed that I had respect for. One of them was the Modern Language Association with whom I had great connections to people like Kenneth Mildenberger and William Riley Parker. I had connections with the National Council of Teachers of English in general. And I followed their example. As much as I could. And they helped me in the beginning. Who knows how to begin an organization. Well, one doesn't know until he gets experience and gets help from other people in the field.*¹³⁹

Here again, Alatis highlights the role models he followed and the principle of collaboration that he had employed in his work at the Department of State with the TOEFL test, at the Office of Education with the research he funded, and at Georgetown with the creation of numerous programs there.

Alatis's description of the mission of TESOL underscores another belief he has expressed, that proper education of teachers was essential to student learning:

[TESOL] did bring again more discipline to the profession than had existed in the past. Where people [thought that] just anybody who knew a language was supposed to be able to teach it. And we all know that teaching a second language is much different than teaching a first language. And those principles were held dear to the TESOL organization. We gave service, it was at the beginning it was just me and a wonderful lady named Carol LeClair, who ran the whole office.

¹³⁹ Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. June 20, 2011.

He expressed concern, too, for providing value for the members of TESOL, who were teachers at elementary and secondary schools across the United States and abroad. He says, “We were kind to the people who subscribed, they would ask me, ‘What do I get for my money?’ Well, first of all you get a convention... You get a... journal. You get a newsletter, you get affiliates. You have special interest sections and so on... they really put me on the chopping block when they said ‘What do I get for my money.’”¹⁴⁰ The idea of providing quality for the members came up several times in our interviews. The fee for joining TESOL when the organization began was \$6, and Alatis had developed many answers to the question he received frequently, “What do I get for my \$6?”

In the beginning, his role also included expanding the membership of the organization to help raise funds. Alatis did this by being more inclusive and reaching out to additional communities for whom English was a second language, namely the American Indian community. He says that he went to “American Indian reservations and they had what in those days was a thousand teacher workshop and they all became members. Suddenly we're in business again.”¹⁴¹ The challenge was to provide a quality organization for members while at the same time providing funding for the organization and managing finances appropriately. In this role, Alatis served once again as a translator, making sure that both the needs of the fledgling organization and the needs of those it served were understood.

Managing TESOL created leadership challenges for Alatis unique to running a volunteer organization. Due to the small size of his initial staff – his own part-time status and the part-time status of a secretary – he relied heavily upon volunteers, including a

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. March 5, 2009.

volunteer board of directors. He describes some of TESOL's efforts that were volunteer-run, saying, "We had volunteers who ended up being journal editor... We had a newsletter editor." Later in the same conversation, he explained

Alatis: I had to work with the constitution and with all these volunteers. I think you expressed an interest in that... Volunteers, especially for a part time executive director, are very hard people to deal with. They, they're temporary, they maybe get three year terms, they rotate every year, so they had to have some kind of continuity which is what an executive director provided for them. And in the process as they began to learn the ropes, before they retired as the, as parts of the executive committee, there were lots of things that needed to be done that weren't done, and I guess, I ended up doing them myself.

Coomber: Like what?

Alatis: Well... for example, the development of guidelines for teacher preparation... I called meetings, found money somewhere to have these meetings, prepare these guidelines which event, eventually ended up helping people get certified for English as a Foreign Language and bilingual education, that's one example, there are lots of things.¹⁴²

Despite the challenges, Alatis was able to provide leadership and channel the energy of volunteers into creating a successful organization. His own willingness to take on projects as part of TESOL, as well as his fondness for the organization, suggests that the time spent on TESOL was well over one-third of his time. His energy and enthusiasm for the organization call to mind his experiences with people who struggled with English in his youth, and suggest that he felt he was exerting agency by creating a vibrant organization to help non-native speakers overcome linguistic challenges.

Alatis was no less committed in his other roles serving Georgetown University as Associate Dean of the School of Languages and Linguistics and Associate Professor of

¹⁴² Ibid.

Modern Greek. He notes that he had roles as an administrator and a professor. He presents his role as a Modern Greek professor, starting first with a little self-effacement, suggesting that Modern Greek was the “only” subject he could teach.

I taught Modern Greek my first year, because they asked me, oh, what can you teach? So, well, I can teach Modern Greek but you know, I've been out of it for awhile, but in those days, students could petition for new courses, and they petitioned for Modern Greek. So what did we do? Ok, I taught it... so [the students] said now that you've done the first year for us, we'd like to use it as our second language. So I taught second year Greek. And then finally they said, well, now that we've got two years of Greek, we need a third year.¹⁴³

Alatis continued to teach in both the Modern Greek program and in the linguistics department on English as a second and foreign language throughout his career, and developed many close relationships with his students. He also taught all three of his sons Greek at Georgetown; in his house, the joke was that they had to come to Georgetown to learn Greek because it was no longer spoken in the Alatis home. Alatis expresses regret that he was unable to create a Modern Greek major at Georgetown, and that it remains a minor.

Besides his teaching responsibilities, Alatis used his knowledge of government funding and policy through his work at the Office of Education to bring in millions of dollars of funding to Georgetown's School of Languages and Linguistics. He explains that his fundraising ability played an important role in Robert Lado's decision to hire him: “He had persuaded apparently the administration that they should hire me because I had been a giver of money, and they thought I would also be a great receiver of money.” He continued, “As it turns out, I was. And so for the first twenty years, twenty one years I

¹⁴³ Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. February 26, 2009.

look back and I had averaged a million dollars a year in grants and contracts.”¹⁴⁴ The projects he worked on for funding range from support for the Arabic area studies, grants for machine translation, programs for language study abroad, and teacher training programs. Given his background in federal government, Alatis found himself capable of translating the needs of the federal government into funding for Georgetown’s SLL. His skills at interpretation formed a foundation for his leadership of the SLL.

Alatis led the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program, which Georgetown began in 1965. This program had both summer institutes and academic year programs. Under Alatis’s leadership and as part of the EFL program, Georgetown applied to become a site for the Experienced Teacher Fellowship Program (ExTFP), a program authorized under Title V, Part C of the Higher Education Act of 1965.¹⁴⁵ The Georgetown program demonstrates Alatis’s adeptness with connecting the activities of Georgetown’s SLL to the policy goals of the day. Alatis says, “It is true that I did follow legislation...and I was a fundraiser, and I wanted to be sure that Georgetown was in the mix here.”¹⁴⁶ As stated in the Georgetown bulletin for the ExTFP,

*The Congress hereby declares it to be the policy of the United States to improve the quality of education offered by the elementary and secondary schools of the Nation by improving the quality of the education of persons who are pursuing or who plan a career in elementary and secondary education” (Title V, Part C, Section 521, the Higher Education Act of 1965). The Georgetown program is designed to increase the effectiveness of elementary and secondary school teachers and supervisors working with pupils who are non-native speakers of English or who are handicapped by non-standard language habits.*¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. March 5, 2009.

¹⁴⁵ "Report on the Experienced Teacher Fellowship Program," (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 1970).

¹⁴⁶ Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. April 28, 2009.

¹⁴⁷ Mead, "The MLA and the Study of Foreign Languages."

The program capitalized on policies occurring at the federal level. In 1965 Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and in 1967 Senator Ralph Yarborough of Texas introduced the bilingual education bill.

*His bill, which became Title VII of ESEA, was intended to meet the "special educational needs of . . . children of limited English-speaking ability" by funding local experiments in bilingual schooling... In essence, they proposed that non-English speakers be taught in their own languages until they were fluent in English.*¹⁴⁸

The federal government was exerting more influence over elementary and secondary school, and bilingual education was beginning to become a concern as well. More broad social change was also occurring at the federal level. Concern for the rights of historically disadvantaged groups, especially African-Americans, in the United States led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. Terence Wiley in his article on language rights in American education sums up the time period: "In the 1960s, during a climate of heightened concern for civil rights, greater educational opportunity for all, and 'remediation,' bilingual education – with assimilation into English mediated education as its goal – was adopted as an *expediency* measure to promote greater educational access."¹⁴⁹ The ExTFP united these concerns – education at the elementary and secondary level, concern for the English spoken by both non-native speakers and those who spoke other, non-standard dialects of English, and concern generally for traditionally disadvantaged groups such as African-Americans and Latinos. Alatis made the program

¹⁴⁸ Gareth Davies, "The Great Society after Johnson: The Case of Bilingual Education," *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 4 (2002).

¹⁴⁹ Terence G. Wiley, "Accessing Language Rights in Education: A Brief History of the U.S. Context," in *Language Policies in Education: Critical Issues*, ed. James W. Tollefson (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc, 2002).

salient by addressing these issues with a program well suited to Georgetown's expertise in linguistics and English as a second and foreign language.

Besides serving as an illustration for Alatis's mastery of the funding process, the ExTFP played a role in the Alatis family. In an interview with Mrs. Alatis, we discussed the ExTFP because she had been one of the participating teachers. Dr. Alatis recounts how it occurred.

Mrs. Alatis was teaching English to native speakers at Francis C. Hammond high school and with the influx of Hungarians and Iranians and then more recently other kinds of nationalities, the schools began to look at the possibility of teaching English to such people, and they asked Mrs. Alatis if she was, she knew a foreign language... So they said, "Won't you do this program for us?" And she came to me and said, "Hey, Jim, they want me to teach English as a foreign language." I said, "That's fine." "Should I do it?" "Yeah, do it." "Will you help me?"¹⁵⁰

Realizing that Mrs. Alatis needed more than just a book to learn how to teach English as a Foreign Language, and that many other teachers and school systems had a similar need to learn the right way to teach English to new groups of non-English speakers, Alatis decided to write a proposal to create a program.

So I wrote a proposal, and as a result of the proposal, I got 20 fellowships, very good ones, for inner city teachers. And, uh, \$60,000 in addition to that for the installation of video for teacher observation and, and, and evaluation. So that was a good program, and I got it for a second year, the third year, bilingual education became prominent and I only got fellowships for Spanish speakers. And that's the way the government works, unfortunately.¹⁵¹

The program lasted for three years, allowing teachers of non-English speakers and English teachers of speakers of non-standard English to earn a Masters of Arts in Teaching (MAT) to teach English as a second language. The final year of the program as

¹⁵⁰ Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. February 26, 2009.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

the attention of the government shifted from the civil rights movement to bilingual education, the program became only for teachers of Spanish speakers.

Alatis then recounted how Mrs. Alatis become part of the program.

*So my committee, looked at the proposals, Mrs. Alatis was one of them. They rejected her. How do I go home tonight and tell my wife she's been rejected? Well, the indomitable Mrs. Alatis said, "OK. Tell them, ask them what would happen if I took it at my own expense." So we had to go the lawyers, and the Office of Education, and Georgetown, and see. They were worried about nepotism... The result was if I could bring at least one more teacher to take this at their own expense, I could do it. I got five more teachers.*¹⁵²

Several of the teachers involved in the program returned to Washington D.C. for inauguration of President Obama in January 2009, which was around the fortieth anniversary of the Experienced Teacher Fellowship Program. They were a group of African-American teachers who taught in inner city schools during the 1960s. They visited with Dr. Alatis, and one teacher, Merle Rawlings Venture, wrote him afterwards about the impact the program made on her life.

*My life changed for the better in so many ways... Without that program the opportunity to attend and graduate from such a great university where I was exposed to new ideas and cutting edge leadership would never even have been a possibility. Over the course of that year, my view of myself changed.... The degree that I received as a result of this program was a pathway to leadership that afforded me opportunities to positively influence the lives of countless young people over a forty year span.*¹⁵³

The powerful testimony of Merle Rawlings Venture reveals the personal impact of Alatis's ability to tie together the interests of the federal government and the resources of

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Merle Rawlings Venture, Letter to James E. Alatis. January 23, 2009.

Georgetown. Her letter suggests that Alatis exercised agency to help others within the historical and political context of the civil rights era, and enabled others to do the same.

The personal impact of Alatis's work, and the view of language as a "family business" of sorts with the involvement of Mrs. Alatis underscores themes developed early on in Dr. Alatis's life in Weirton, West Virginia. Helping others through languages had been a theme since his early days of life in the Greek community. The leadership of a new organization designed to help teachers of English as a foreign language (TEFL) and teachers of English as a second language (TESL) of helping those through the use of language. Just as he translated for his family in Weirton, West Virginia and for non-English speaking students in his high school, he was instrumental in the creation of an organization (TESOL) and programs that educated teachers to translate the needs of these same populations.

The period from 1959 to 1973 marked a significant transition in James E. Alatis's life. He began the era moving from a graduate student who had benefited from mentorship and sponsorship of some of the most illustrious names in the field of languages and linguistics. He ended the era as a leader of a new organization that served to mentor thousands of ESL teachers. Having benefited from opportunities and his extensive network, he began to use that network to create opportunities for others using the resources of Georgetown University. Alatis encountered significant leadership challenges during this time period as well. He took the fledgling organization of TESOL and found ways to both provide benefits to members and to mind the bottom line. He took the skills he had developed in his youth and early roles at the Office of Education in interpreting among groups of people to foster a productive outcome, and used these skills

at Georgetown's SLL to earn funding for the school. Alatis also experienced significant personal transformations as well. His mother passed away, delaying the completion of his dissertation. He came to Washington D.C. with a wife and a young son, and by the time he moved on to become Dean of the Georgetown School of Languages and Linguistics, he had three sons. He had also completed his dissertation, an essential credential for moving forward with his career. The delicate balancing act between family, leading a school, leading a professional association, and mentoring others would continue as he assumed his next role, that of Dean of the School of Languages and Linguistics. In this role, Alatis continued to employ the trope of leader as interpreter to find ways to communicate, collaborate, and lead.

Chapter 5: A Linguist at the Helm

In 1973, James E. Alatis became dean of the Georgetown School of Languages and Linguistics. For Alatis, the promotion represented a continuation of his work at the school since 1966 when he became Associate Dean. He continued as Executive Director of TESOL, devoting one third of his time as executive director of that organization. While some programs he had spearheaded had ended, such as the Experienced Teacher Fellowship Program, he continued to run the Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics and take on new initiatives, such as establishing an EFL program in Japan. During his more than two decades as Dean, Alatis saw a number of successes, from recruiting talented faculty to building ties with Japan. These successes included efforts outside of Georgetown, such as establishing a successfully lobbying organization for the languages, JNCL-NCLIS. He also encountered his share of failures, including the inability to establish a Modern Greek major. For Alatis, the most significant challenges of this period were not in sustaining the organizations he loved, the SLL and TESOL, but in being part of the transition as TESOL moved on to a new model of a full-time executive director and Georgetown budget cuts saw the SLL become part of the Georgetown College of Arts and Sciences. Many of Alatis's recollections of his time as Dean of the SLL are colored by the closing of the college, and reinforce his notion that a dedicated single school for the languages and linguistics protects and furthers their teaching. Despite the changes in the organizational structure, Alatis had imparted his lasting vision on TESOL and the SLL, and his impact endures in both of these organizations.

Alatis's promotion to dean was a proud moment for the West Virginia native. A press release from Georgetown quoted then-University president, the Reverend R.J. Henle, S.J., in saying, "We are pleased to promote from within a person who had demonstrated excellent teaching and administrative qualities in his seven years at Georgetown."¹⁵⁴ A hometown newspaper, the *Weirton Steel Employees Bulletin*, related the news of his promotion to dean and recounted, "Dr. Alatis was graduated from Weir High School in 1944, and worked in the Weirton Steel open hearth for several summers while attending West Virginia University."¹⁵⁵ Dr. Alatis himself said, "I used to brag that I was the only Greek Orthodox dean on the campus. Even though I was not a... Catholic, the differences are very small."¹⁵⁶

In our conversations, we barely discussed the circumstances which led to Alatis's becoming dean of the SLL. His description made it seem as if it flowed naturally from his work at the Office of Education and as Associate Dean at the SLL. He told me

Then, in 1973, I was offered; I was promoted from... associate dean and associate professor to dean. But I didn't get promoted to full professor because some of the things that I had been writing were not necessarily academic, they were administrative, for money, and so they did not give me my promotion until a year later when I made the argument that it's just as hard to do the, the proposal as it is to write a dissertation. So I became full professor two years later. So I was full professor, with tenure, and full dean, 1973.¹⁵⁷

In his depiction of how he became dean, he focused more on the fact that he did not receive the honor of becoming full professor as well at the same time. The simplicity with

¹⁵⁴ "Dr. James E. Alatis named Dean of Languages and Linguistics," ed. Georgetown University (Washington, DC May 31, 1973).

¹⁵⁵ "Weirton Native Advances at Georgetown," *Weirton Steel Employees Bulletin* July/September 1973.

¹⁵⁶ Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. March 5, 2009.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

which he states that he was offered the deanship belies the hard work he had done for his seven years at Georgetown to earn the position.

Alatis indicated that part of his promotion to dean was due to his ability to bring in funding to the SLL. Besides bringing in more funding, the grants that Alatis spearheaded made the SLL relevant to the academic community and beyond. The Experienced Teacher Fellowship Program he had initiated is one example of the relevancy of the SLL. In a letter dated April 30, 1969 from the Office of the Academic Vice President Thomas J. Fitzgerald to all faculty members, a section titled “Crisis in the Cities” highlights the courses that teach about concern for the city. In this vein, the Academic Vice President mentions the Experienced Teachers Fellowship Program:

Initiated by Dr. Alatis and directed by Professor Joseph Sheehan, [it] is now finishing its first year. At this writing assurance have just been received from the Office of Education that it will furnish further support to this highly imaginative undertaking. I believe that this program which draws upon the pedagogical and research talents of our School of Languages and Linguistics represents a particularly appropriate university response to the needs of the city.¹⁵⁸

The program’s link with President Johnson’s “War on Poverty” and the fact that the program provided a service to teachers in the Washington, DC metropolitan area made the program a good public relations story for the school and the university, and brought in funding. Alatis’s involvement in bringing the ExTFP to Georgetown made a strong case for him to become dean of the SLL.

Similarly, Alatis brought in money for other programs that both aided the budget of the SLL and created unique programs that set the school apart. Having taken over leadership of the Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics

¹⁵⁸ "Faculty Letters from AA/VP," (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Archives, SLL Box 2, Folder 5:9, 1967-1969).

(GURT), Alatis secured a National Science Foundation grant to fund the program in 1969.¹⁵⁹ The SLL Annual Report for 1971-1972, the year before Alatis became dean, indicates the importance of this program which made GURT known for both excellence in linguistics and for sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics, a subfield of linguistics which came to prominence in the 1960s, is “the study of language in relation to society.”¹⁶⁰ Sociolinguistics is a branch of applied linguistics and seeks to understand both society and language better by examining how language is used by individuals in society. As Alatis discusses in his brief history of GURT, “The Georgetown University Round Table became a forum for this subfield of linguistics when it was still in its infancy.”¹⁶¹ The program attracted talented faculty to Georgetown, including Roger Shuy and Ralph Fasold who had collaborated on research on African-American English, and Deborah Tannen, known for her work on sociolinguistics and language differences between the genders. GURT had attracted funding, recognition for scholarship, and talented faculty to Georgetown, all under Alatis’s direction. A recent newsletter from Georgetown University notes that the university is “home to the world’s first sociolinguistics program, founded by James E. Alatis and Roger W. Shuy.”¹⁶² The focus on sociolinguistics at GURT recalls the trope of interpretation in Alatis’s leadership; he was able to translate the sometimes obscure field of linguistics into a discussion that was tangible to society at large.

¹⁵⁹ "A Brief History of the Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics," in *Round Table on Languages and Linguistics: Linguistics, Language and the Real World: Discourse and Beyond*, ed. Deborah Tannen and James E. Alatis (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003).

¹⁶⁰ Richard A. Hudson, *Sociolinguistics* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹⁶¹ Alatis, "A Brief History of the Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics."

¹⁶² "Faculty Profile," *Faculty of Languages and Linguistics Newsletter* December 2011.

The ability to attract funding to Georgetown in the early 1970s was a strong reason to appoint Alatis as dean. Funding for higher education dipped in the 1970s. As Derek Bok explains, “As the economy slowed after the energy crisis of 1973, Congress could no longer sustain the rapid increases in research funding that occurred during the 1950s and 1960s.”¹⁶³ Georgetown University was no exception to the general economic climate. Almost as soon as he had taken the helm, budget crises emerged for the University as a whole. At a cabinet meeting in January of 1974, a report was distributed that featured a cartoon dated November 1973 showing a young man with his suitcases arriving at home saying, “No I’ve got plenty of money. It was the college that went broke.”¹⁶⁴ Alatis’s notes from this meeting included the word “CRUNCH,” underlined, and then went on to note, “No leeway, there’s no fat left!!!”¹⁶⁵ Alatis worked diligently to maintain a balanced budget despite the funding difficulties and the difficulties unique to the SLL due to fluctuating enrollments in the languages. He maintains that the strength of the languages and linguistics at Georgetown depended on having a dean to fight for their budget, since, as he says, “at Georgetown there was always the competition among the schools for budgets.”¹⁶⁶ Having a dean to fight for all the languages provided strength, and allowed the more popular languages such as French and Spanish to balance out the lower and fluctuating enrollments in the less commonly taught languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Turkish, and Greek.

¹⁶³ Derek C. Bok, *Universities in the Marketplace: The Commercialization of Higher Education* (Princeton University Press, 2003).

¹⁶⁴ "Budget - Cabinet Meeting," (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Archives, SLL Box 3, Folder 5:27, January 9, 1974).

¹⁶⁵ "Budget - Cabinet Meeting," (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Archives, SLL Box 2, Folder 5:27, January 8, 1974).

¹⁶⁶ Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. July 8, 2010.

The budget, the competition between different languages and departments, including linguistics and English as a Foreign Language, and the need to promote all the languages equally explain why Alatis believed the SLL needed to be organized as a its own college, with a dean and a dedicated budget. Alatis explained his motivation for providing support for the less commonly taught languages:

My big thing was to make the languages prominent and permanent. And specifically, since I had been referred to quote end of quote as the neglected language man within the Office of Education... I wanted to insist that all these languages, besides Spanish, French, German, and Italian and to some extent Russian... that something ought to be done about these uncommonly taught languages including Arabic, Chinese, Japanese. It turned out that they needed the support, and I maintained that interest and maintained those languages here at Georgetown. And I don't think there was any question in those days about the importance of such languages... And so my big thing is to, was to keep the foreign languages in uppermost in people's minds and to continue to support the less commonly taught languages.¹⁶⁷

The less commonly taught languages, due to low enrollments or “low density,” as Alatis termed it, needed support due to the fact that interest in these more difficult to study languages fluctuated. Alatis underscored his conviction for the need for a single school for the languages and linguistics in the same interview:

These languages were protected, that's the point. They were protected under a dean. We were not a division, we were not a department, we were not an institute, we were a school. Of languages and linguistics. A school with its own budget. Like the other schools for example. We got our budget from the provost's office based upon I guess tuition and enrollments... I always argued that there was the School of Foreign Service, the College of Arts and Sciences, there was the law school, there

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

*was the medical school, and here was the School of Languages and Linguistics.*¹⁶⁸

Besides his words, Alatis's diction demonstrates his conviction and passion for this particular topic. Normally his sentences are long, peppered with clauses and flow into one another as he expounds upon his thoughts. In this passage, the punctuated sentences and clauses lend strength to his ideas. A dean for the languages and linguistics lent strength and gave prominence to the languages. He could exercise agency to protect languages, especially the less commonly taught languages, despite the pressures upon academia at the time. He translated the needs of the school to the administration, and in turn translated the needs of the administration to the faculty in his college.

In addition to promoting the various languages equally, Alatis sought to bring a linguist's vision to the teaching of languages at Georgetown. In this he continued the tradition established by Dr. Robert Lado, the first dean of the SLL, and himself also a linguist. Alatis continued to promulgate his vision that linguistics was the key to creating high-quality language learning. The first annual report for the SLL with Alatis as dean discusses the movement of the school away from the grammar-translation method to a focus on spoken language. The school aimed to provide all students with opportunities to practice spoken language. This curriculum adjustment required a different kind of staffing, since spoken language practice demanded smaller classrooms. The organization of the school was such that the SLL had larger classes with senior staff members, and smaller group sessions with "drill masters" who would drill students in spoken language.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

These drill masters were often junior faculty or graduate students.¹⁶⁹ The method adopted at Georgetown during the 1970s closely followed the recommendations of the best research at the time on language learning, research which Alatis knew well and had supported during his time at the Office of Education.

The new intensity of language study at the SLL raised other challenges for Alatis as a leader. An undated report in the SLL archives, which culled reports from departments in 1976, repeated a common refrain of staffing challenges for the language departments, whether they were commonly taught or less commonly taught. The report stated that Arabic, German, and French all had overcrowded classes, and that the use of drill masters was only partially successful. Alatis had to balance the needs of the SLL faculty to provide quality instruction with the limited resources available from the University. Outside funds helped, but it took a significant amount of effort to draft and submit proposals for grants and contracts. The challenges of balancing funding and the needs for staffing underscore one of Alatis's assessments about being dean, which was that he often had to play the "bad guy" to his own faculty.

The internal tensions also had to do with the fact that the, as is in most universities, deans were anathema. They were the enemy. They were THE administration...And... that's why we uh, would have a certain chairman of departments would want to flex their muscles and want to get more faculty for their student... for their programs and so on.¹⁷⁰

As Alatis was able to bring in more funding, he found ways to say "yes" more often to his faculty and provide resources. The annual reports for the SLL give summaries of the funds earned each year through these efforts, and confirm Alatis's assertion that he

¹⁶⁹ "School of Languages and Linguistics Annual Report," (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Archives, SLL Box 2, 1973-1974).

¹⁷⁰ Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. July 8, 2010.

himself averaged about one million dollars a year as dean. As he says, “The main focus I thought was bringing in money... when I came to Georgetown, there was an endowment of about 7 and 1/2 million dollars. I said, ‘What have you guys been doing for the past 200 years?’ So I started to work on money. And that was a relative, relatively successful from foundations to the government.”¹⁷¹

Another tactic Alatis used was to balance tuition dollars from Georgetown across the different languages. Each year, the dean from each of the colleges went to discuss his school’s budget with the provost. Alatis explains the situation:

Here at Georgetown there was always the competition among the schools for budgets. I mean, I was interpreter for the rest of the people in the school with the provost. And I would go and everybody, all the deans would go one at a time and talk to him. ‘And how much did you get out of him this time?’ ... It was a constant battle, and of course everybody else is trying to get that government money as well.¹⁷²

Funding was often limited, as the notes Alatis took during the budget meetings indicate – his notes from a 1973 meeting, mentioned above, underline the word “crunch!!!” For Alatis, the single dean speaking for all the languages had a balancing effect and strengthened all the languages. In this example, Alatis himself uses the word “interpreter” to describe his leadership. He represents his role as interpreting on behalf of his school, but at times he also found himself needing to translate the needs of the University administration to his college as well.

Alatis goes on to explain the balancing act of funding he performed to support both commonly taught and uncommonly taught languages.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

But because we were able to balance tuition from the commonly taught languages and from linguistics, and from ESL, I would always say as an entity, we are a school with its own budget, and with um, which we balanced which I considered to be fiscal soundness and academic integrity.¹⁷³

The ability to balance the budget and maintain fiscal responsibility came up several times during our interviews. Alatis underscored the idea often, since budgetary concerns were among the main reasons given for closing the SLL in 1994. In his view, he and his faculty brought in funds and maintained fiscal responsibility during his tenure as dean.

Alatis dealt with concerns large and small as dean of the SLL. Various records from the SLL reveal the day-to-day life of being dean. Issues of faculty promotion and tenure were primary concerns, especially the concern of having too many tenured faculty members in a department which was a particular concern in the small language departments of the SLL. One mundane but contentious issue which required Alatis's willingness to go to bat for his faculty was an issue over a faculty member's car being towed. Despite Alatis's defense of his faculty member, the towing fee had to be paid.¹⁷⁴ Other letters reveal the influence of parents, including a letter from a parent complaining his daughter was bored in her SLL classes.¹⁷⁵

Alongside the day-to-day issues of being dean, Alatis engaged in creating a strong vision for the SLL. His vision included making the languages "prominent and permanent," especially the neglected languages; ensuring quality teaching by undergirding teaching methods with linguistic theory; and working in close partnership with government agencies and foundations, not just for funding, but to create relevancy.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ "Towing of Dr. Matilde Mansilla's Car from Parking Lot 9," (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Archives, SLL Box 2, January 29, 1973).

¹⁷⁵ "Letter," (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Archives, SLL Box 2).

Global connectedness for the SLL was another essential component to his vision as dean. He traveled around the world, to China, Japan, South America, and India promoting the school. He spoke at numerous international conferences on languages and linguistics, including speeches in Japan and Greece. He endeavored to establish programs with other universities in teaching English as a Foreign Language and attracting new students and faculty to the SLL. Examples of these efforts were Chinese students coming to study at the SLL in 1979 and a program to provide English language instruction for computer technicians working with Hewlett Packard in China.¹⁷⁶ In these activities, he served as an interpreter for the languages, explaining the benefit of studying them – especially at Georgetown – to people all around the world.

Alatis's professional activities extended beyond the SLL. He continued as Executive Director of TESOL, which remained a part-time position. The organization continued to grow from its initial meetings and offer services to teachers of English as a second language around the world, including a newsletter and TESOL quarterly. He writes in a ten-year review of TESOL, titled *The Past as Prologue*, that he is "happy to report that the membership has increased from 337 in March, 1966, to over 5,000 at the end of calendar year 1975. Of the total 1975 membership 22.7% are memberships from abroad."¹⁷⁷ The organization had developed resources cataloguing teacher training and methods, hosted a number of successful conventions, created relationships with other organizations to promote English as a second language, worked with the U.S. government in contracts ranging from education on Indian reservations to providing

¹⁷⁶ "School of Languages and Linguistics Annual Report for the 1979-80 Academic Year," (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Archives, SLL Box 1, 1980); "School of Languages and Linguistics Annual Report for the 1980-81 Academic Year," (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Archives, SLL Box 1, 1981).

¹⁷⁷ "The Past as Prologue," *TESOL Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (1976).

scholarships for foreign students to attend TESOL conventions, and created lists of specialists in the field during their ten-year history. In keeping with Alatis's own experience, the organization also kept an eye on legislation related to English as a second language and promoted dialogue around these issues in their publications and at the annual convention. Alatis reveals the challenges of managing the organization alongside the triumphs. He attributes the "present strength of TESOL, both numerical and financial... to the selfless dedication, devotion, and energy of its membership and its officers."¹⁷⁸ Just as he had experienced at Georgetown, funding for language initiatives such as TESOL were in short supply. A lack of funding for certain initiatives prevented them from occurring, and his article notes that "Twice the present TESOL dues, for example, would amount to no more than the cost of a good dinner at an expensive restaurant with a drink and wine for two people."¹⁷⁹ The funds provided through membership fees sustained the organization. During the nascent period of TESOL Alatis had to prove to members "what they were paying their \$6 for." He continued to make the case for the value of the organization as it became more complex, providing more services and requiring more funds.

Alatis become involved in new efforts to support and promote the languages as well. In 1978, President Carter called for a President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies.¹⁸⁰ The Reverend Timothy S. Healy, then president of Georgetown University, was appointed to the commission and Alatis served as an advisor to Healy in that role. One recommendation that came out of the commission report,

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ "Strength through Wisdom: A Critique of U.S. Capability," *The Modern Language Journal* 64, no. 1 (1980).

published in 1979, was that “A private body, the National Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies, should be established, with mainly private funding, to monitor and report on this field and encourage its support by government and the private sector.”¹⁸¹ Alatis remarked that when the report came out,

I saw what was happening, I'd been in the government and I saw what happened to these reports. And at a meeting for the Joint National Committee on Languages in Tucson, I said, 'Look you guys, what's going to happen to this? It's going to die. We ought to have our own lobby group.' And so to thank me for my suggestion, they made me chairman of the committee to find somebody. And we found a couple of people, most of them didn't work out too well, but then I found that gem in the backyard named Dave Edwards. After a search and after a lot of arguments, they appointed Dave and he's done a wonderful job.¹⁸²

Alatis became the president of the Joint National Committee on Languages-Council for Languages and International Studies (which later became National Council for Languages and International Studies) from 1980 to 1988. Alatis continues to serve JNCL-NCLIS, often speaking at the annual meetings on the need to act collectively, rather than as individual language groups, when working with the federal government. The trope of leader as interpreter appears here too, as the languages needed a strong presence to interpret their needs to congress through lobbying. JNCL-NCLIS also translated the needs of the government back out to language associations, aiding them in making their efforts at promotion more salient to the needs of the day.

Alatis and the SLL entered the 1980s on an upswing. The President's Commission on Foreign Languages and International Studies brought renewed focus to the languages, and the SLL benefited from the new national attention on the languages.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. February 26, 2009.

To promote their cause the SLL distributed a survey to their alumni, and issued a report titled "What do SLL Graduates Actually Do?" The findings reported that 65% were in elementary or secondary teaching roles, 12.24% were in college or university teaching, and 8.24% worked in the corporate sector.¹⁸³ Alatis promoted the school to parents as well, outlining the opportunities that awaited their sons and daughters if they studied languages. Alatis said, "Parents ask, 'What are you going to do with English? What are you going to do with Chinese?' Parents need to know what kind of jobs kids are going to get. And we were able to persuade them that there are all kinds of jobs for people who have linguistics."¹⁸⁴ Calming fears of parents and persuading them to the usefulness of languages was another regular task Alatis performed as dean. Parents and prospective students were two more groups in need of a translator, who this time translated the usefulness of a foreign language education to them.

The uptick in national interest in languages and self-promotion by the SLL resulted in an increase of students in the SLL. After relating about how he would persuade parents, Alatis recalled, "We had an increase of about 21% of enrollments... that is, applications in 1981." The SLL annual report from 1980-1981 confirms a 21% increase in the undergraduate applicant pool, a significant jump.¹⁸⁵ Alatis was able to make the case to the rest of Georgetown University in 1981 to reinstate the language requirement in the College of Arts and Sciences.¹⁸⁶ He relates that he was able to influence the college to adopt this requirement, even though the method of teaching was

¹⁸³ F.P. Dinneen, "What Do SLL Graduates Actually Do?," (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Archives, SLL Box 2, Folder 5:20, July 1980). Shows that 12.56% are in high school or other teaching, 12.24% in college/university teaching, and 8.24% in corporate business.

¹⁸⁴ Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. July 8, 2010.

¹⁸⁵ "School of Languages and Linguistics Annual Report for the 1980-81 Academic Year."

¹⁸⁶ "School of Languages and Linguistics Annual Report for the 1971-1972 Academic Year," (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Archives, SLL Box 2, 1972).

not as intensive as courses in the SLL, “We wanted to be sure that languages were represented, and in fact I brought about the inclusion of the requirement in languages in the college. Which was, they were taught in a non-intensive way, three hours a week, forever, the Dribble Method.”¹⁸⁷ The college language requirement made the services of the SLL more incorporated into the rest of the Georgetown curriculum.¹⁸⁸

Alatis’s travel resulted in increased opportunities for the SLL. In the early 1980s, there had been increased interest in studying Japanese, which required external funding to support. There was also a desire on the part of Japanese students to learn English.¹⁸⁹

Alatis established a program for teaching English at the Tokyo International College of Business. Alatis called it “a big program in Japan. For teaching English.”¹⁹⁰ The program was a summer program, and the SLL provided two faculty members for teaching English as a foreign language.¹⁹¹ The program expanded the reach of the SLL and provided funding through the tuition dollars of the Japanese students. It represented the combination of Alatis’s vision, teaching English abroad and globalizing the SLL, and his practicality of finding additional sources of funding for the school.

Alatis encountered challenges and transition in other areas despite the successes of the SLL. In 1987 he stepped down as Executive Director of TESOL as the organization moved in a new direction. The organization had grown to a point where they needed a full-time Executive Director, and Alatis’s part-time status was no longer desired by the

¹⁸⁷ Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. July 8, 2010.

¹⁸⁸ An office memorandum to the SLL department heads dated October 14, 1981, indicates the reinstatement of the language requirement for freshmen entering in the fall of 1981. Anne Davis-Gerarden, "Language Requirement of the College, Office Memorandum to SLL Department Chairs," (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Archives, SLL Box 2, Folder 8:29, 1981).

¹⁸⁹ "School of Languages and Linguistics Annual Report for the 1982-1983 Academic Year," (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Archives, SLL Box 1, Folder 4, 1983).

¹⁹⁰ Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. March 5, 2009.

¹⁹¹ "SLL Meeting with Fr. Freeze, June 7, 1988," (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Archives, Box 15, Folder 14, 1988).

board. Alatis had referred to the challenges of leading the organization with a volunteer board of directors, and they sought to limit his power as the organization grew and the board became more influential. He describes the conversation between him and the board.

*At that time then, the question had to be, 'What do we do about Alatis?' [I replied] 'I could go on being the Executive Director if you want me to,' and so they gave me a term. So, about a five year term. That's an important thing to do for an executive director. You've got to be given a, a beginning and an ending date so that he can extricate himself from all these problems.*¹⁹²

The conversation about his leadership included some uglier political battles as well, such as disagreements over his wife's travel to the TESOL conferences. Alatis explains, "And also there was some question about the spouse's travel and so on. Most of the time, Mrs. Alatis when she would come with me paid her own way for example. So there are all kinds of little nitty-gritty things that came up."¹⁹³ The "nitty-gritty" issues evolved into larger issues, suggesting that the board desired a change in the way that TESOL was run. During Alatis's tenure with the organization, he had served as a part-time director, devoting one-third of his time to TESOL and two-thirds of his time as dean of the SLL. He explains some of the conversations around his decision to step down.

*I was... part time executive director, but I was holding three jobs and so and I, I guess, this is part of the lore that goes with it. Somebody said, well, look, he, this guy's, he's got three jobs and many of our people are not working at all. Let's fire him. And get a full time executive director. I mean, that's kind of naive, but... I stepped down... from TESOL in 1987 as it turns out. At the last conference in Miami at the Fontainebleu Hotel. And then I just became, just a dean. And so. That was TESOL.*¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. March 5, 2009.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

Unlike the closing of the SLL, which we discussed many times, this conversation was the only time that Alatis mentioned his departure as Executive Director of the TESOL. Alatis instead preferred to focus on the work he had done in establishing the organization. Although this discussion suggests that the departure as Executive Director was not quite amicable, he has been honored at many subsequent TESOL conventions for his work with the organization through The James E. Alatis Award for Service to TESOL. The prize honors service to the organization and the website notes “This award was established in 1987 to honor James E. Alatis for his 21 years of devoted service as TESOL's first executive director.”¹⁹⁵

As the 1990s approached, challenges also appeared in his deanship. Budgetary concerns once again came to the forefront of leadership at the SLL. A note to the provost from October of 1990 cites that a number of faculty searches at the assistant professor level were underway, which would alleviate budget pressures since the new faculty would replace more highly compensated full professors.¹⁹⁶ Further archival records document the worsening situation. In a meeting with Fr. Freeze, the provost, a suggestion is raised that the SLL can balance the budget of the Spanish department by borrowing funds from the French or Linguistics department, both of which had smaller numbers of faculty and students. Alatis's handwritten notes for this meeting state that this move

¹⁹⁵ "The James E. Alatis Award for Service to TESOL," TESOL, http://www.tesol.org/s_tesol/sec_document.asp?CID=368&DID=661.

¹⁹⁶ "Letter from James E. Alatis, Dean to J. Donald Freeze, SJ, Provost dated October 16, 1990," (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Archives, SLL Box 15, Folder 33, 1990).

would be dangerous politically, because Linguistics would find out and raise hell. He also wrote and circled “no money.”¹⁹⁷

In 1991 the budget situation became even worse. Although he had formerly been opposed to using funds from one department to aid another, Alatis agreed to the move. He sought, and received approval for it from the provost. Alatis created other efficiencies. He told me, “That's about that time that we began to lose money from the AID and I decided to merge the ALI [American Language Institute] and the DEFL [Division of English as a Foreign Language].”¹⁹⁸ The move made up for losses brought about by a reduction in the AID contract and integrated English as a Foreign Language and English as a Second language into one center.¹⁹⁹ Alatis mentioned this a couple of times in interviews. His repetition of this event demonstrates that it was important both symbolically and substantially, and showed his willingness to sacrifice programs for the larger good of the SLL.

Staffing language classes with faculty members proved to be another challenging area for Alatis. Salaries were by far the greatest expenditure at the school, and language classes had lower enrollments than other classes on campus yet still required a faculty member for each individual course. These smaller courses, however, often offered a higher number of credits, requiring more work on the part of the faculty member. University-wide reports did not always take into consideration the disparate number of

¹⁹⁷ "Individual Appointment with Fr. Freeze, December 4, 1990," (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Archives, Box 15, Folder 35, 1990).

¹⁹⁸ Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. July 8, 2010.

¹⁹⁹ "Proposal for Reorganization and Merger of ALI and DEFL and the Future Establishment of an SLL Language and Education Center," (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Archives, SLL Box 15, Folder 36, 1991).

credit hours taught by SLL, focusing instead on numbers of enrollments.²⁰⁰ The debate became tense while budgets were tight, as Alatis found himself as once again serving as interpreter between the faculty and the administration, with neither side happy with his message.

Staffing the Spanish department was a particularly tough challenge. The faculty in the department felt that their department was understaffed for the demand of students. Notes from Alatis's meeting with the provost indicate that 80% of students at the School of Foreign Service were being taught by adjuncts, usually an undesirable indicator at a university. One Spanish department faculty member was retiring and had asked for a phased retirement where he would earn the same salary with reduced teaching load, a common practice at Georgetown. Due to the tight budgets, this meant that the SLL could not hire someone full-time to replace him. The faculty conducted a "sick out" in protest to their teaching loads. The rest of campus was not sympathetic to their plight. Deans and faculty from other schools noted in memos and in the "Faculty Teaching Loads, 1986-87 to 1989-90" report that the average student load for Spanish faculty was half that of the social science professors.²⁰¹

While budget concerns appear to be the primary reason for the closing of the SLL, both in Alatis's recollection and in the archival notes, there are suggestions that wresting power away from the deans of the colleges at Georgetown was another. I interviewed Richard Cronin, Associate Dean of Administration at Georgetown who worked for

²⁰⁰ J. Donald Freeze, "Faculty Teaching Loads, 1986-87 and 1989-90," in *A Memo from Freeze to Stuart Rich (Director of Institutional Research), dated March 13, 1991* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Archives, SLL Box 15, Folder 37, 1991). Shows the number of credits for SLL faculty and number of students enrolled in each class.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

several years with Alatis in the SLL, about Alatis and the closing of the SLL. Cronin points to Alatis's self-sacrifice for the school in the early 90s when Georgetown was in budget crisis and looking to make cutbacks. When the talks began to center around closing the SLL, Alatis went to university administration. He asked whether his resignation would save the school. Their answer was no. The SLL retained some of its administrative structures, however, and exists today as the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, a quasi-independent entity within Georgetown College.

For Alatis, the story of the end of SLL and his tenure as dean came up many times in our conversations, and remains a disappointment for him. In our second interview he said, "All in all, I think I've had a pretty happy career. Until they closed my school."

When I asked him why they closed the school, he said

I don't know anything about, I don't know what, what the president at the time, I guess it was under pressure to show that he had, an economic motive, in saving money. And he decided that we were going to trim our sails. So he was going to close the school.²⁰²

In a later interview he elaborated upon the closing of the school, the new organizational structure of the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics (FLL) and the impact that it had on the languages.

1994 when they decided to close the school. It's because they argued that it was a matter of fiscal exigency. They wanted to get rid of a dean, who was expensive, and they instituted this thing which I referred to as the roving deans. They would appoint a member of the faculty to be the convener of the faculty, it became the faculty [of Languages and Linguistics]... [the convener] would make rules and, and make judgments and then they'd go away after one year. So there was no continuity, and no one could defend the uncommonly taught languages or the commonly

²⁰² Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. March 5, 2009.

*taught languages.*²⁰³

I asked Alatis if the move to close the school created actual budget efficiencies, or whether the move was more symbolic. He replied, “They saved my salary, they think. And they saved space, you know, for the dean's office.”²⁰⁴ He laments that the move occurred right before Georgetown was about to open the brand-new building called the Intercultural Center. He said, “We were on the verge, of opening up this entire building, which we called the Intercultural Center.”²⁰⁵ Alatis underscores a different kind of symbolism, that Georgetown was claiming the mantle of internationalism through the opening of the new building at the same time they were closing their school of languages.

The archival records of Georgetown did not include any explicit information on the decision to close the school. Meeting notes between Alatis and the provost, cease in 1992, although archival record (see Appendix IV) suggests that the records are kept through 1995, one year after the school closed.²⁰⁶ A Self-Study Report for the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools completed in 1993 suggests that the reasons for closing the school were to eliminate redundancies between the colleges. The report notes that the College of Arts and Sciences, School of Foreign Service, and the School of Languages and Linguistics have similar curricula for undergraduate students’ first two years of study, and that a growing number of students seek internal transfers during this time. The report goes on to note

In part in response to this development, there is growing evidence of what appears to be a blurring of the curricular differences between the Schools. It is not confined, moreover, to the introductory-level courses. More and more, for

²⁰³ Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. July 8, 2010.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ See Appendix IV, SLL Finding Aid NMC Request

*example, have the upper-level curricula in both the School of Languages and Linguistics and the School of Foreign Service been adapted to accommodate the needs of students who are interested in a more humanities-based education. In fact, as things now stand, the differences that now exist between majors in the SLL and the College of Arts and Sciences may consist of as little as two linguistics courses.*²⁰⁷

Because of the blurring of the curricula of the three schools, there is, according to the report,

*growing uncertainty about what precise role each of the schools has in relation to the larger mission of the University. The older they become, the more institutionalized their leadership becomes, and the more they find themselves in competition with one another for students as well as resources, the harder it seems to be for the Schools to maintain clarity of purpose.*²⁰⁸

The efforts at consolidation within universities were widespread at this time. “Mounting stringencies” caused colleges and universities of all kinds, from private liberal arts colleges to large research universities, to consolidate programs, lay off faculty, use less expensive labor such as graduate assistants and adjuncts, and close schools. 1993 was the height of this movement, and in July of that year “the American Council on Education declared that severe financial constraints were forcing many universities to restructure academic programs, limit enrollments, and reduce in size the tenured portion of their faculties.”²⁰⁹ Closing the SLL fell within this widespread trend in higher education at the time. Without a strong dean protecting his faculty, it was easier for the administration to convince a “roving dean” as Alatis calls it to reduce demands on the budget, whether through program termination or through eliminating faculty positions.

²⁰⁷ "Self-Study Report for the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools," (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Archives, SLL Collection, unboxed, 1993). 104.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ J.S. Brubacher and W. Rudy, *Higher education in transition: a history of American colleges and universities* (Transaction Publishers, 1997). P. 403-404.

Alatis recounts how he was informed of the closing of the school:

I had a call from the provost. He said, I need to talk to you. I said, OK, Father Heland. What about? About the school. And that's when he unloaded on me. That he wanted to be closed and (snaps fingers) had to be closed by March. And I used the Ides of March to talk about it. I think it's, narrow minded and its very, very limited vision.²¹⁰

By closing the SLL, Georgetown made a statement about their priorities. Internationalism and globalism were a strong focus of the university. The administration expressed through its decision to close the SLL that they could maintain Georgetown's international and global strength without a dedicated language college. The precarious place of language in American society, the view at various points in time that speaking foreign languages was seditious, and the lack of urgency for many Americans to speak a language other than English made the School of Languages and Linguistics an easier target for Georgetown than one of their other colleges. Closing the School of Foreign Service would have been anathema, but somehow the SFS and other colleges – and Georgetown's image as a school with a strong international focus – could survive without a dedicated language college. Alatis, in his retelling of the closing, clearly disagrees. The narrow-minded vision that international studies can be strong without the languages is contrary to the view held by Alatis and many others in the language community. His assessment stems from the work he did at the Office of Education to promote the languages within the area studies at universities across the U.S.

Alatis harbors bitterness about the closing of the school he had dedicated thirty years of his professional life developing. His recollections of his leadership of the SLL

²¹⁰ Alatis 7/8/10 Alatis. Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. July 8, 2010.

appear to be filtered through this lens. The symbolism of closing the SLL represents a devaluation of languages and linguistics by Georgetown University. However, the activities of much of what was the SLL continue in the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics (FLL). Less commonly taught languages, including Arabic, Greek, and Asian languages are still taught at Georgetown. The Georgetown University Round Table still regularly convenes, and often still focuses on sociolinguistical issues that demonstrate the real impact of linguistics on society. Deborah Tannen and other star scholars he helped bring to Georgetown are still there. Christopher Morpew, in his article on program termination, notes that “the termination of a degree program is a traumatic event for students, faculty, and staff involved with the program.”²¹¹ In the case of the SLL, no degree programs were eliminated; rather, the organizational structure around the school transformed. While traumatic for Alatis as a loss of prestige for the languages, Georgetown managed to preserve the degrees awarded by the school. The decision to eliminate the organizational structure of the SLL while preserving the programs perhaps made the best of a difficult budget climate.

The documents and photographs Dr. Alatis shared with me demonstrate, more than his words, what the promotion to become dean of the SLL meant to him. He himself passed along the issue of the *Weirton Steel Employees Bulletin* that contained news of his promotion. We spent an afternoon session just going through photographs, which Alatis hastily introduced to me. He moved quickly through photographs that showed him meeting Mother Teresa, posing with a group of students from South America, and a photograph of Alatis and his wife Penelope standing with a group of students from Tatung Institute of Technology in Taipei, China. Along with this last photograph, Dr.

²¹¹ Parker, *The Language Curtain, and Other Essays on American Education*.

Alatis handed me, without much explanation, a red velvet covered box containing a plate, inscribed “Dr. James E. Alatis, Our Sincere Congratulations on Your Twenty Years of Distinguished Service as Dean of the School of Languages and Linguistics, Georgetown University. Dr. T.S. Lin, President, Tatung Institute of Technology, July 1993.” Dr. Alatis’s willingness to share these items, but unwillingness to describe much about them, suggests to me that the pride he felt in being Dean at Georgetown is something he could not quite express in words. Being Dean allowed him to experience travel that he never imagined as a child in Weirton, West Virginia. The position allowed him to help countless people learn languages, not just in Washington, DC, but around the world. The position of dean made him responsible for the coordination of the activities of the SLL towards a common goal, the goal of promoting the best quality learning and teaching of the languages and linguistics. He established as dean a strong model for leadership in the languages, demonstrating how a leader can serve as an interpreter between different parties to create collaboration towards a common vision. Though the organizational structure of the SLL changed, the goal of educating students in the languages at Georgetown continues.

Conclusion

Having been shaped by his upbringing in Weirton, West Virginia, James Efstathios Alatis directed fundamental organizations that would emerge as transformative for the field of languages and linguistics. His childhood experiences among Greek immigrants and other first generation Greek Americans, including his participation in a community-based language school, kindled his passion for teaching languages and English as a second language. He recognized the benefits of language learning in his own life, and the access and opportunity that learning English afforded others. These experiences inspired his work at the Office of Education administering funding from the NDEA, and informed his leadership at the Georgetown School of Languages and Linguistics and TESOL. Alatis inherited traditions of the Greek diaspora, Greek language, and the work ethic of his immigrant community, and then experienced the cultural milieu of academia. He faced policy changes resulting from major historical events, including World War II, the Cold War, the civil rights era, and economic downturns that impacted university funding. These events informed his understanding of educational leadership, and he utilized this understanding as he led language education organizations through the past several decades. Throughout his life, Alatis used language and linguistics as tools to exercise agency in a number of contexts, and his belief in their power remains strong at 85 years old. He exerted leadership through serving as an interpreter for the languages, helping disparate factions understand each other more thoroughly and move towards a common vision.

Alatis's oral history sheds light on the transformations in the field of language education that have occurred since the Second World War. The story of languages and

linguistics is one of funding. Unlike other subjects that form the heart of the American curriculum, languages have always held a tenuous place in the American educational system. As Alatis himself notes, only a crisis provokes policymakers in the U.S. to provide more funding for the languages. During World War I, languages become anathema, representative of having enemy sympathies. World War II represented a turn in this sentiment, as a dearth of trained language professionals, especially in critical languages, threatened to hamper U.S. security. The U.S. needed more professionals trained in Russian, Japanese, and other less commonly taught languages. Through the efforts of the MLA and ACLS, and moved to action by the launch of the Russian satellite Sputnik, Congress passed the National Defense Education Act in 1958. The language community cheered and got to work, creating area studies centers at a number of universities by increasing language training, giving out fellowships, and creating materials in many neglected languages of the world.

As Alatis's experiences attest, however, this heyday would not last. Despite federal support for languages, Alatis expresses the view that within individual organizations such as Georgetown University, languages and linguistics needed a strong administrative figure to fight for funding. At the federal level, funding for the languages was at the whim of each presidential administration and Congress that came to power in Washington. Georgetown University's wavering support for the languages makes the uncertain position of the languages clear. Each time budget cuts were imminent, Alatis worked hard to find funding from outside the university to support his college. The shaky economic footing of the School of Languages and Linguistics convinced Alatis that the mission of the school, to provide education in linguistics and both commonly taught and

less commonly taught languages, would not be achieved without the hand of a strong dean to protect all of his departments.

Throughout this research, a number of additional research topics arose as worthy of study. As mentioned in several places, a definitive historical work on language and linguistic education in the United States during this time period does not exist. Historical work needs to be done to collect both the oral testimony of individuals like Alatis who were involved in NDEA and the subsequent language education boom. Many of these influential figures may not be here much longer to offer their insights and perspectives. A documentary history of the period also needs to be written, and a number of documents that Alatis has in his personal collection would be an excellent start for this work. A historiography of these documents to show how attitudes towards language learning have changed over time would be fruitful as well, and provide an essential resource to historians, educators, and policy makers.

Each of the associations affiliated with the language learning community, like TESOL, deserves to have their history written, especially featuring oral testimony of those who founded and established the organizations. Although organizations such as TESOL and ACTFL have done internal histories, an outside perspective would bring the history of those associations into the context of the history of language learning and the history of professional associations. The contention over a small number of resources that the associations have experienced, how they were able to come together to form the lobbying organization JNCL-NCLIS, and their relationship to the uneasy place of language learning in the United States would all be potential topics to explore.

As the research unfolded, Alatis's family became more and more involved in the uncovering of documents and arranging his schedule for interviews. The unsung role of academic families, and in particular academic wives, would be an interesting area for research. Oral histories of faculty wives would uncover the gender differences in academic careers. Even in families with two academics, gender differences exist. Obtaining the perspectives of a number of faculty wives would provide a rich narrative. This work would be useful to those mentoring female graduate students and young faculty members as they enter the academic profession.

Finally, the subject of language programs and schools closing at colleges and universities would shed light on the place of language learning in American society. Such a study would include the closing of Georgetown's SLL, but it would place this event in the larger context of language program termination that occurs all too frequently in the United States. The pressures upon administrators who must make such decisions are myriad, and program termination is never an easy decision. For language programs in particular, from elementary schools all the way to graduate education, staffing for less commonly taught languages when enrollments are low is a perennial problem. Examining the decision of several schools to terminate individual languages or language programs would provide useful information to administrators as they seek new ways to advance language learning in an era of increasingly tight budgets.

Georgetown's elimination of the School of Languages and Linguistics in 1994 stands as a metaphor for the place of languages and linguistics education in American society. As Alatis and other informants indicated, the elimination of the SLL was largely symbolic, since Georgetown retained many of the administrative structures and costs of

the SLL since they replaced it with the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics within the College of Arts and Sciences. It seems as if Georgetown closed SLL to create the appearance of fiscal responsibility during difficult budgetary times. Since the School of Languages and Linguistics was the only school to be closed at that time, the message was that language teaching at Georgetown was of secondary importance compared to other disciplines. For example, the School of Foreign Service remained, indicating that diplomacy was still important enough to justify an independent school. By closing the SLL and not the SFS, Georgetown implied that Americans can be good diplomats without language training.

Georgetown's decision to close the SLL weighed heavily on Alatis, as the school represented a tangible manifestation of his vision for the teaching of languages and linguistics. The university, however, retains an incredible strength in languages and linguistics despite the change in administrative structure. Alatis's vision, too, remains powerful for those he has influenced. In letters from individuals he taught or worked with, the impact of his drive and passion for languages is clear. The chair of the Arabic department wrote to Alatis upon his retirement, "Although the shape of the school will not apparently shift into new forms, it bears the indelible stamp of your gifted guidance over the past 20 years."²¹² Another letter commends Alatis's role in creating JNCL-NCLIS, the language lobbying organization, and notes, "All of us have profited professionally from your immense energy, your deep concern for the profession, and your seemingly inexhaustible reserve of tact."²¹³ His impact on the field appears through the

²¹² Karin C. Ryding, Letter to James E. Alatis. March 16, 1994.

²¹³ Gerald L. Ervin, Letter to James E. Alatis. May 13, 1987.

thanks of countless individuals who have written him over the years, thanking him for his service, passion, and drive to improve language education.

In 2012, James E. Alatis will retire from Georgetown University after serving the school for 45 years. In my three years of working with Dr. Alatis to capture his story, it is clear that despite his retirement, his passion and advocacy for more prominence for language and linguistic education in the United States will continue. His life during a time of transformation in the field of languages and linguistics makes his story a useful tool for those with similar goals. His oral history gives one example of how one's determinacies of culture, history, and language shape leadership; yet Alatis's story also demonstrates how individuals can exercise agency within that set of determinacies to create a lasting impact. Alatis served as an interpreter for the languages, and may be reluctant to retire from the field until he sees a new generation of leaders interpreting on behalf of the languages in a new era. Alatis's impact lies in his powerful vision, his promotion of talented individuals, his model of language leader as interpreter, and his passion for the languages despite numerous challenges.

Appendix I: Curriculum Vitae of James E. Alatis

Curriculum Vitae

Name: James Efstathios Alatis

Birthplace: Weirton, West Virginia

Birthdate: July 13, 1926

Citizenship: American

Marital Status: Married, three children

Military Service: U.S. Navy Reserve, Pharmacist Mate, Third Class from December 1944 to June 1946

Office Address: International Language Programs and Research
519 B Intercultural Center, Box 571045
Georgetown University
Washington, D.C. 20057-1045

phone: (202) 687-5659

fax: (202) 687-0699

E-Mail: alatisj@georgetown.edu

EDUCATION: B.A. in Political Science and English
West Virginia University, 1948. <http://www.wvu.edu>

M.A. in English Linguistics
The Ohio State University, 1953.

Phi Beta Kappa

Master's Thesis: "The Americanization of Greek Names."

Ph.D. in English Linguistics
The Ohio State University, 1966.

Doctoral Dissertation: "The American-English Pronunciation of Greek Immigrants: A Study in Language Contact with Pedagogical Implications."

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY:

1994–present: Distinguished Professor of Linguistics and Modern Greek, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057–1045, www.georgetown.edu

1994–present: Dean Emeritus, School of Languages and Linguistics, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057–1045

1994–present: Sr. Advisor to the Dean of Georgetown College for International Language Programs and Research, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057–1045

1987–present: Executive Director Emeritus, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)

1973–1994: Dean, School of Languages and Linguistics, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057-1067

1975–1994: Professor of Linguistics and Modern Greek, School of Languages and Linguistics, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.20057-1067

1966–1987: Executive Director, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL); offices located at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.

1966–1973: Associate Dean, School of Languages and Linguistics, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.20057

1966–1975: Associate Professor of Linguistics and Modern Greek, School of Languages and Linguistics, Washington, D.C.20057

1966–1969: Consultant to ERIC Center for Research on Language and Language Behavior, the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan

1965–1966: Chief, Language Research Section, U.S. Office of Education, DHEW, Washington, D.C.

1961–1965: Specialist for Language Research, U.S. Office of Education, DHEW, Washington, D.C.

1959–1961: English Teaching and Testing Specialist, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C.

1959–1960: Lecturer in English as a Foreign Language (part-time), American University, Washington, D.C.

1957–1959: Assistant in English (part-time), Department of English, the Ohio State University

1955–1957: Fulbright Lecturer, Linguistics and English as a Foreign Language, University of Athens, Greece

1953–1955: Graduate Assistant in English (part-time), Department of English, the Ohio State University

AFFILIATIONS AND MEMBERSHIPS:

Professional Associations:

[American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages \(ACTFL\)](#)

Fulbright Alumni Association

[International Association of World Englishes \(IAWE\)](#)

Linguistic Society of America (LSA)

[Modern Language Association of America \(MLA\)](#)

[National Association for Bilingual Education \(NABE\)](#)

[National Association for Foreign Student Affairs \(NAFSA\)](#)

[National Council of Teachers of English \(NCTE\)](#)

Phi Beta Kappa

[Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages \(TESOL\)](#)

TESOL, Greece

Professional Positions:

Member, Advisory Committee, [Test of English as a Foreign Language \(TOEFL\)](#), Educational Testing Services (ETS). 1973–1975.

President, the [Joint National Committee for Languages \(JNCL\)](#) and the Council for Languages and Other International Studies (CLOIS) — now the National Council for Languages and International Studies (NCLIS). 1980–1988.

Member, English Teaching Advisory Council (ETAC), United States Information Agency (USIA). 1985–1992.

Executive Director Emeritus, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and lifetime TESOL member. 1987–present.

Member, Board of Directors, JNCL and NCLIS. 1988–present.

Member, Administrative Steering Committee, JNCL and NCLIS. 1988–present.

Member, Board of Visitors, Defense Language Institute. 1990–present.

President, [TESOL International Research Foundation](#). 1999–present.

Member, Oversight Committee for the Greek Orthodox Archbishop's Commission on Greek Language and Culture. 1999–present.

Editorial Positions:

Guest Editor, International Journal of the Sociology of Language: Aspects of Sociolinguistics in Greece, special issue. 1997.

Advisory Board, The Journal of Language for International Business. 1993–present.

Consulting Editor, World Englishes (Journal of English as an International and Intranational Language). 1993–present.

Editor, Georgetown Journal of Languages and Linguistics. 1992–1995.

Editorial Board, English Today, The International Review of the English Language.

HONORARY RECOGNITION RECEIVED:

Phi Beta Kappa, West Virginia University, 1948

Fellowships and Grants:

American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship: Summer Linguistics Institute, University of Michigan, 1955.

Fulbright Grant to Greece, 1955–57

Fellow, American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1966–69

Awards:

Mary Glide Goethe Prize, American Name Society, 1954

Mikotaj Kopernik Award, Polish Embassy, 1974

Alcalde (Mayor) of the City of San Antonio, Texas, award for outstanding leadership in professionalizing the field of teaching English as a second language, 1984

Northeast Conference Award for Distinguished Service and Leadership, 1985

Georgetown University Vicennial Medal for University Service, 1986

National Association for Bilingual Education President's Award

Greater Washington Association of Teachers of Foreign Languages (GWATFL)

Distinguished Foreign Language Administrator Award, conferred for outstanding administrative performance and great professional contribution to the field of foreign-language education, 1987

Distinguished Alumnus Award, Department of Political Science, West Virginia University, 1989

The Georgetown University Alumni Admissions Program Recognition Award, in honor of twenty- three years of University service and dedication, 1990

Pioneer in Bilingual Education Award, National Association for Bilingual Education, 1991

President's Medal, Georgetown University, 1994

Patrick Healy Award, G.U. Alumni Association, April 1995

President's Award for Service, Joint National Committee for Languages and National Council for Languages and International Studies, April 1995

Other Recognition:

Directory of American Scholars

Who's Who in American Education

National Register of Education Researchers

World Directory of Linguistics

Who's Who in America

PUBLICATIONS: Books and Monographs**Authored:**

Quest for Quality: The First 21 Years of TESOL. Alexandria, VA:TESOL Publications, 1991.

Edited:

Contrastive Linguistics and Its Pedagogical Implications, Monograph Series on

Languages and Linguistics #21 (Report on the 19th Annual Round Table). Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1968.

Linguistics and the Teaching of Standard English to Speakers of Other Languages or Dialects, Monograph Series on Languages and Linguistics #22 (Report on the 20th Annual Round Table). Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1969.

Bilingualism and Language Contact: Anthropological, Linguistic, Psychological and Sociological Aspects, Monograph Series on Languages and Linguistics #23 (Report on the 21st Round Table). Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1970.

International Dimensions of Bilingual Education, Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics, 1978. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1978.

Current Issues in Bilingual Education, Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics, 1980. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1980.

Language Teaching, Testing, and Technology: Lessons from the Past with a View Toward the Future, Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics, 1989. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1989.

Linguistics, Language Teaching and Language Acquisition: The Interdependence of Theory, Practice and Research, Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics, 1990. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991.

Linguistics and Language Pedagogy: The State of the Art, Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics, 1991. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1992.

Language, Communication, and Social Meaning, Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics, 1992. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1993.

Strategic Interaction and Language Acquisition: Theory, Practice, and Research, in honor of the late Robert J. Di Pietro, Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics, 1993. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1994.

Educational Linguistics, Cross-Cultural Communication, and Global Interdependence, Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics, 1994. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1995.

Co-Edited:

with Kristy Twadell, English as a Second Language in Bilingual Education. Washington, D.C.: TESOL, 1976.

with Richard I. Brod and E. Michael Gerli, *Language in American Life: Proceedings of the Georgetown University Modern Language Association Conference October 6-8, 1977*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1977.

with G. Richard Tucker, *Language in Public Life*, Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics, 1979. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1979.

with Howard B. Altman and Penelope M. Alatis, *The Second Language Classroom: Directions for the 1980's*. Oxford University Press, 1981.

with H. H. Stern and Peter Strevens, *Applied Linguistics and the Preparation of Second Language Teachers: Toward a Rationale*, Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics, 1983. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1983.

with John J. Staczek, *Perspectives on Bilingualism and Bilingual Education*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1985.

with Deborah Tannen, *Language and Linguistics: The Interdependence of Theory, Data, and Application*, Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics, 1985. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1986.

with Carolyn A. Straehle, Brent Gallenberger, and Maggie Ronkin, *Linguistics and the Education of Language Teachers: Ethnolinguistic, Psycholinguistic, and Sociolinguistic Aspects*, Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics, 1995. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1995.

with Carolyn A. Straehle, Maggie Ronkin, and Brent Gallenberger, *Linguistics, Language Acquisition, and Language Variation: Current Trends and Future Prospects*, Georgetown University Round Table on Language and Linguistics, 1996. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996.

with Carolyn A. Straehle and Maggie Ronkin, *International Journal of the Sociology of Language: Aspects of Sociolinguistics in Greece*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1997.

with Ai-Hui Tan, *Language in Our Time: Bilingual Education and Official English, Ebonics and Standard English, Immigration and the Unz Initiative*, Georgetown University Round Table on Language and Linguistics, 1999. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999.

with Heidi E. Hamilton and Ai-Hui Tan, *Linguistics, Language, and the Professions: Education, Journalism, Law, Medicine, and Technology*, Georgetown University Round Table on Language and Linguistics, 2000. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2000.

PUBLICATIONS: Reports

editor, State University System of Florida Foreign Language and Linguistics Program Review. State University System of Florida, February 1992.

PUBLICATIONS: Articles

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"The Less Commonly Taught Languages in the American Educational Context"

[AHEPA](#) "Evolution of the Greek Language and its Dialects"

"Heritage Languages in America: Blueprint for the Future," eds. Joy Peyton, Scott McGinnis

PUBLICATIONS: Book Reviews

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(curriculum vitae can be found online at
<http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/alatisj/cv.html>)

Appendix II: Narrative Curriculum Vitae of James E. Alatis (written by Alatis and unpublished)

CURRICULUM VITAE OF JAMES E. ALATIS

James Efstathios Alatis was born on July 13, 1926, in the steel manufacturing town of Weirton, West Virginia. He was the second of seven children in a first generation Greek-American family. His father was born on the island of Cyprus, his mother on the island of Chios. They had come to America seeking a "better life." His father operated a store where he sold Greek magazines and newspapers, books and records, and religious commodities for Greek homes. Later the family bought a dry cleaning establishment where young Alatis worked after school and on weekends while he was in high school. He attended Weir High School from 1940 to 1944. In his junior year he was president of the junior class, and in his senior year he was a member of the National Honor Society and president of the Weir High Student Council. In this he established a precedent followed by most of his brothers and sisters: two of them later held this same office, and two became presidents of their senior classes. Another precedent was established when James went to college: five members of the family followed, and each went on to the Master's degree.

He graduated from high school in the upper tenth of his class in 1944. He worked in the Weirton Steel Mills for one summer, after which he enrolled in the College of Engineering at West Virginia University. He had been advised that mathematics and engineering subjects would be of greatest help to him in the armed services. His college work was interrupted in the middle of his

first semester when he was drafted into the U.S. Naval Reserve. He served in the Navy for nineteen months, first at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center near Chicago, next in the Hospital Corps Training School in San Diego, California, and then at the Chelsea Naval Hospital, Chelsea, Massachusetts, where he served as a psychiatric technician and was honorably discharged as Pharmacist's Mate/Third Class in 1946.

Since he had gone past the middle of the first semester at WVU in 1944, he was given credit for the subjects he had taken; and when he returned to college in 1946, again after a summer in the Weirton Steel Mills, he began as a second-semester freshman. He was able to graduate with an A.B. degree by May 1948, because of what was known as the "honor point system," in which a student was able to subtract one credit hour from the total required for graduation, for every eight honor points in excess of "C." The result was a very high cumulative ratio, but a very limited exposure to the great ideas of the Western world, about which he had developed an insatiable curiosity.

He was elected to Phi Beta Kappa before receiving his A.B. degree in 1948, with a major in political science and minors in English and sociology. Feeling quite poorly prepared, in spite of his Phi Beta Kappa key, he went to the Harvard Law School in the fall of 1948. Family pressure had dictated that he become a lawyer. At Harvard, however, he found that he was just another frustrated humanist, a phenomenon apparently not uncommon in the

Law School. He felt that his attitudes had not yet been sufficiently formed, that he was not prepared to limit himself to the learning of "skills" in law. There was a reaction against channelizing his talents toward the development of a "legal mind." In May 1949 he withdrew while his record was still good and, at the instigation of his family, entered the Law School of Ohio State University in the fall of 1949. He had found law too restrictive a field for his ever-expanding intellectual curiosity, but thought that at a smaller school he could get a degree in law and satisfy his craving for knowledge later. He was merely rationalizing, he realized later, and after what he considered a noble but futile attempt, he left the Law School in what seemed at the time utter and complete disgrace.

By this time he had been virtually disowned by his family, but he was happy to be left to his own devices at last. He went on to work on a railroad construction gang, and while he was preparing to enter graduate school he worked in a lumber yard, at odd jobs, and finally as a clerk for the Ohio State University Research Foundation. He had decided to use what was left of his G.I. Bill in the study of English. He was seeking knowledge, "culture"; he felt that he must "round out his personality." He chose the field of English because it seemed that here was the place to combine the acquisition of knowledge with the inner satisfaction one gets from reading good writing.

In the fall of 1951 he was introduced to the study of linguistics, a field in which he had always, without realizing it,

been interested. He had grown up in two cultures and had learned two languages simultaneously from childhood. To Modern Greek and English had been added a rather thorough knowledge of Spanish, which he was able to learn easily by comparing the pronunciation and grammar to that of Greek. Furthermore, he had lived in an international atmosphere in his home town, where many different nationalities were represented, and he had developed a "feeling" for languages and cultures other than his own.

He found it necessary to leave school for financial reasons at the end of the winter quarter in 1952. He looked for work as a claims examiner and insurance agent to tide him over until he returned to school, but it seemed that for these jobs he had "too much education." Finally he ended up working in an aircraft factory. He was determined to return to school and complete the requirements for the Master of Arts degree. In the fall of 1952 he was granted a graduate assistantship in the English Department of The Ohio State University which helped solve his financial problems and also provided him with some necessary experience in teaching. He got his M.A. in English and linguistics in 1953.

He was a graduate assistant in the Department of English at OSU between 1953 and 1955, while working on his Ph.D. in English. In the summer of 1954 he was awarded an American Council of Learned Societies grant to study at the Summer Linguistic Institute of the University of Michigan. His Master's thesis, entitled "The Americanization of Greek Names," was awarded a prize by the American Name Society and was published in the September 1955 issue of Names.

In 1955 he was appointed Fulbright Lecturer in English as a Foreign Language at the University of Athens, Athens, Greece, where he remained for two years. On the way to and from Greece he was Language Coordinator on the TSS Olympia's Travelers Recreation and Information Program, for the Council on Student Travel. While in Greece, in addition to teaching English to Greek students, he taught Greek to a group of American Fulbrighters.

On his return to the United States he became Assistant in English in OSU's Department of English while continuing his studies toward the doctorate. In the spring of 1959 he completed his course work in English and Linguistics, passed his language examinations in French and German, and his general examinations, after which he was admitted to candidacy for the Ph.D. In June 1959 he accepted a position as English Language Specialist for the International Educational Exchange Service of the Department of State. His job was to provide professional guidance to all American Consular and Diplomatic posts in the field of English teaching and testing. In addition, he taught an evening course in English to Foreigners at American University, and did research on his dissertation in the splendid libraries of Washington, D.C.

From 1961 to 1965 he was Specialist for Language Research in the Language Development Branch of the U.S. Office of Education, where he was responsible for arranging contracts with universities for the preparation of specialized instructional materials

in the "significant but uncommonly taught languages." From 1965 to 1966 he was Chief of the Language Section, Research Branch, U.S. Office of Education where, in addition to the so-called neglected languages, he was responsible for contracts for the preparation of materials in the commonly taught languages and for studies and surveys on effective methods of teaching modern foreign languages.

In 1966 he left the U.S. Office of Education to write his dissertation, the subject of which was "The American English Pronunciation of Greek Immigrants: A Study in Language Contact with Pedagogical Implications." He was awarded his degree in English and Linguistics from The Ohio State University in 1966, at which time he was appointed to the position of Associate Dean and Associate Professor of Linguistics at the School of Languages and Linguistics, Georgetown University, a position he has held until the present.

Also since 1966 he has been Executive Secretary-Treasurer of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL): A Professional Organization of Those Concerned with the Teaching of English as a Second or Foreign Language, whose offices are located at Georgetown University. His academic interests, as reflected in his publications, have been contrastive linguistics and its pedagogical implications, linguistics and the teaching of English to speakers of other languages or dialects, bilingualism and language contact, and the social, regional and functional varieties of English and of Modern Greek.

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On the undergraduate level he has taught Modern Greek at Georgetown since 1966, and on the graduate level he has taught a colloquium in English as a foreign language, and a practicum for TESOL in elementary and secondary schools. In 1968 he conducted a seminar on "The Metropolitan Sociolinguistic Barrier" at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.

Besides Greece, Dr. Alatis has traveled to England, Mexico, Italy, Yugoslavia, Germany, France, Switzerland, and Austria, where he attended the University of Vienna Summer School. Dr. Alatis knows Modern Greek, and has a passing acquaintance with Classical Greek, as well as with Old and Middle English. He also has a working knowledge of Spanish, French, and German.

He is married to the former Penelope Mastorides of Campbell, Ohio, who teaches English and English as a Second Language at Francis C. Hammond High School in Alexandria, Virginia. Mrs. Alatis has a B.A. degree from Youngstown College, had done graduate work at The Ohio State University, and received her MAT in Languages and Linguistics from Georgetown University.

Dr. and Mrs. Alatis have three sons, William, Stephen, and Anthony, ages 20, 15, and 10 respectively. William is in his junior year at the School of Languages and Linguistics of Georgetown University, where he is majoring in Linguistics and in Spanish. He plays the guitar, the piano, and the bouzouki. Stephen is a student at Francis C. Hammond High School in Alexandria, where he also studies Spanish. He has played football in the programs

of the Alexandria Recreation Department, and for Hammond High School. Anthony is a student at James K. Polk Elementary School. He plays football, basketball, baseball and soccer for the programs of the Alexandria Recreation Department.

Dr. Alatis is a member of the following professional organizations: /Linguistic Society of America, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Modern Language Association of America, National Association for Foreign Student Affairs, and National Council of Teachers of English. He is listed in the Directory of American Scholars, Who's Who in the South and Southwest, and Who's Who in American Education. Dr. and Mrs. Alatis and their family make their home in Alexandria, Virginia.

Appendix III: Poem Celebrating Alatis

AN INTRODUCTION

(3rd April 1975)

Alatis--
the word's winged;
and the subtle Greek who owns it
--James Alatis--
by simply being American
ensures its assonance.

He's better acquainted than Botticelli
with the exact islet
where Venus Anadyomene first set foot;
and the rock on which
Zeus gave astonishing birth to Athene
rises in the center of his mind.

Like Odysseus, he's a multi-witted man.
Unlike Odysseus, he takes Penelope with him:
Calypso's arms are also hers
(but her captivity is also enfranchisement);
She guards him from the enchantments of Circe,
and there is no danger that Nausicaa should imagine too much.

Wise and affectionate man, we greet you.

They say you are a dean,

but what are deans?

(Superhuman with subhumanity.)

We have evidence

that you are a human being.

Arthur H. King

Appendix IV: SLL Finding Aid

Documents requested are highlighted.

COLLECTION NAME: LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS SCHOOL: 96-97
ACCESSIONS

BULK DATES: 1980 - 1992

SPAN DATES: 1951 - 1991

EXTENT: 28 Boxes

SERIES: 1. Reports: 1960-1992

Includes Annual Reports, Faculty Reports, Departmental Reports, Dean's Reports and Self-

Evaluation Reports.

SERIES: 2. School Council/Committee Files: 1961-1995

Includes material related to various faculty search committees and the revision of the SLL constitution well as material from the following groups:

Executive Council

Academic Council

Department Chairs and Division Heads

Freshman Admissions Committee

Language Laboratory Committee

Graduate Committee

Undergraduate Curriculum Committee

Committee on Admission of Graduate Students in Linguistics

Advisory Committee on Foreign Graduate Students

Committee for Excellence in Graduate Programs

SFS/SLL Liaison Committee
Committee on English Language Proficiency of Foreign Graduate Students
Optimum Class Size Committee
Standards Committee
SLL Advisory Council
Executive Committee of Sociolinguistics Program
Advising Committee
Linguistics School Advising Committee, 1975-1975.
Advising Committee, 1974
Russian Curriculum Committee, 1976-1977
SFS/SLL Liaison Committee
Committee to Study Problems of Academic Advising & Records
Board of Graduate Studies, 1961-1966
Graduate Committee, 1975
Scholarships and Loans
ILL - Committees
Foreign Language Testing Committee

SERIES: 3. Subject Files: 1957-1994

Contains material on the following subjects:

Faculty Meetings: 1976-1982

Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs/Provost

Executive Vice President

Academic Vice President

Search Committee for Academic Vice President

Academic Affairs VP

Faculty Letters from AA/VP, 1967-1969

Gibney, Marie-Helene

Assistant to the VP

Fr. Fitzgerald's Inauguration

Fr. Kelley's Inauguration

Academic Calendar

Advisory Faculty Research Council

ACTFL Oral Proficiency Workshop

ALI/World Health Organization

American Language Institute

Questionnaire Survey of SLL Graduates

University Alumni Survey Questionnaire

American Association for Applied Linguistics

Arabic

Assessment of Language Departments

Background Material on the SLL

Bensky: Bicentennial Proposal

SLL Budget

Budget: Cabinet Meeting, 01/08/1974

Budget Meeting, 12/06/1973

Senate Budget Committee

Council of Deans

Equipment Awards Committee

Graduate School Executive Committee

Languages/Linguistics Area Council

Writing Committee

ICC Word processing Committee

Main campus Case Statements

Goals and Objectives Statement, 1978

Center for Applied Linguistics

Commencement

Tropaia

1985 Colloquium on Spanish, Portuguese, and Catalan Linguistics

Phi Beta Kappa

Graduate Honors Convocation

Business School Tropaia

Szeryng Honorary Degree

Core Curriculum

Dana Foundation

Disability Leave

D.C. Public Schools Project

Faculty Development Seminars

Faculty Forum

Faculty Luncheon, 08/29/1981

Faculty Recruitment

Foreign Service Institute: Foreign Language Achievement

Federal Relations

Honorary Degrees

Martin Chair

Ionesco, Eugene (Honorary degree Recommendation)

Honorary Degree Ceremony: Placido Domingo, 09/30/1992

de Larrain Honorary Degree

Dom Basilio Penido

Rostropovich Honorary Degree
Honorary Degree Committee 1979
Kennedy Honorary Degree
Stefan Horn
DAAD Scholarships
German Department Statement of Purpose
German
Graduate School Constitution
Confirmation of Grade Class Roster, Fall 1987
Father Healy
Father Healy: Death
Intensive Foreign Language Instruction
Intercultural Center Task Force
Intercultural Center: Opening
Intercultural Center: Space Allocation
Intercultural Center
Middle States Self-Study
Linguistics Department
Linguistics: Undergraduate Curriculum Committee Report
Madrid Program
IREX Soviet Teacher Exchange
John Carroll Awards Weekend, 1989
The Dean Robert Lado Award (Tropaia Exercises-1980)
Language Acquisition and Development Center
Kuwait Visit, 10/29/1985
Kuwait University
"Ladle Rat Rotten Hut"

Language Enrollments

Language Proficiency Program

Language Requirement of the College

College Language Requirement (Sub-Committee Report, 1978)

Language Proficiency Exams

Newsletters

Interfaces

Sabbatical Requests, 1992-1993

National Resource Center for Intercultural Studies

New Faculty Conference, 1981

New Student Survey, 1980

Sandor Rot

Monterey Institute of International Studies

Rockefeller Foundation

National Science Foundation

GU/Ohio University Egypt Prospectus

Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences

Professor of the Year: Nomination of Heidi Byrnes

University Planning

OIP Self-Study: English Programs

Liberal Arts Core

New Ways of Analyzing Variation Conference, 1986

Research at Georgetown

Staczek Paper

Gerli Paper

Walsh Paper

Irizarry Paper

Rameh Paper

Student Handbook

University Development

Annual Report

Languages/Linguistics Area Council

State Department

Council of Deans

SSCE Dean

University Relations

Development

Public Relations (Director)

GU Press

SLL Day

Modern Greek

SDS

International Reading Association

Student Bill of Rights

Luce Scholars

Learning Resource Center (Proposal), 1971

Alpha Mu Gamma

SLL Retreat, 1988

Saudi Arabia Negotiations

GEICO Achievement Award

EPDA Meetings

SLL Enrollment Data

Official Enrollment Statistics - Spring 1982

Department Reports, 1980-1981

ICC Auditorium and Multilingual Room

University Writing Committee

SLL Foreign Language Theater Series

Education Amendments

Bilingual Education Act

Thailand Exchange Program

English-Speaking Union

Subcommittee on Financial Resources

Affirmative Action Committee

Student Admissions Committee

Guidelines For Proposals

HEW Ethnic Heritage Studies Program, 1974

Ford Foundation Grant: Progress Report

Ford Foundation Grant: Final Report

President, Office of

Press Notices (Fr. Healy)

Fr. Healy's Inauguration

Press Dinners, 1978

Presidential Counselors Dinner

Fr. Freeze

Provost

Provost's Newsletter

Fiesole (Copies of Translations done by R. Severino)

Fact Book For Planning

Main Campus Goals and Objectives (Aug. 1981)

Provost Classroom Visits

Decanal Review

Individual Conferences

Institutional Research

Graduate School Dean

Board of Graduate Studies

Graduate Student Organization

Executive Faculty

National Science Proposal

Institute Graduate Committee

Fulbright-Hays Fellowships

NDFL Proposal

Experienced Teacher Fellowship Program

Fellowships

German Department

AVP Faculty Letters

Fr. Dinneen's Correspondence as Acting Dean

President's Newsletter

History Dept.

Dean Schwartz Meetings

Graduate School - Research Council

Meeting with Dean Herberg

Proposal for Five-Year Plan

Graduate School EXCO Minutes

The Chronicle

Kawaijuku

Surveys -- Outside Organizations

Teacher-Training: Sidwell Friends School

Russian Dept.

Summer Research Grants for 1983

Videotape Equipment

Faculty Recruitment

Space for Egyptians

Dean's Retreat, 06/17/1975

Space, Office

Intercultural Center Program

Alumni Association

Summer in Mexico

Course Inventory

SLL Grievance Procedures

Greater Understanding of Languages and Linguistics Group

Overseas Programs: Evaluation, May 1977

Conflict of Interest Policy

Assistant Dean for Undergraduates

Departmental/Divisional Status Reports

Student Teaching

Washington Linguistics Club

Academic Computer Users Committee

Acumenion

Autonomous University of Guadalajara

Muriel Saville-Troike

Lily Wong Fillmore

Sofia University

South Africa, 1986

Spanish Department Programs

Spanish Department

John Staczek

Summer Certificate Program in Linguistics for TESOL

Publications Director

Tri-University Evaluation Project

Writers' Voices: All Things Considered

Kensaku Yoshida

SLL Undergraduate School

Reorganization of Graduate School, 1974

Kenji Hakuta

Giorgi Vercellin

NSF Proposal, 07/01/1969

AACRAO-AID Project: Foreign Student Credentials

National Institutes of Health/Stone

SLL Ad. Materials

OE Meeting on International Studies Centers, Nov. 1972

CSIS

Office of Education

Institute of Languages and Linguistics Organization Chart

Fadner Paper

Translation Courses (Proposed)

Regional Meeting of NDEA/OE, 12/02-03/1976

GU Language Processing Center

Exchange Program with Catholic University of Peru in Lima

Greg Stahl - Development

Kuwait, Embassy of

Ancient Drama: Live From Greece

Ph.D. Program Expansion

Consortium of Universities
Midweek Report
Examinations
Graduate Catalog: Linguistics, 1988-1989 (Corrected Copy)
Arabic Examination, 02/15/1979
New Students Reception -Boston, 04/22/1977
Latin American Center
"Research in Foreign Language Teaching Methodology"
Dean Alatis: Correspondence, 1975-1993
Committee on Grants and Contracts Accounting
Study: Foreign Language Reading Comprehension
Oficina de Educacion Iberoamericana
ILL

SERIES: 4. Georgetown University Round Table (GURT) Files: 1951-1996

SERIES: 5. Publications (Non-GURT): 1952-1980

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- . Email to Nicole M. Coomber, August 30, 2011.
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- . Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. Digital recording. Washington, DC, June 20, 2011.
- . Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. Digital recording. Washington, DC, February 26, 2009.
- . Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. Digital recording. Washington, DC, March 5, 2009.
- . Interview by Nicole M. Coomber. Digital recording. Washington, DC, July 23, 2009.
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