Language Variation —
European Perspectives

Edited by
Francis Hinsken

John Benjamins Publishing Company
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Selected papers from the Third International
Conference on Language Variation in Europe
(ICLaVE 3), Amsterdam, June 2005

Edited by

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John Benjamins Publishing Company
Amsterdam/Philadelphia
Levelling, koineization and their implications for bidialectism

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to explore some aspects of the present-day Greek Cypriot dialect which suggest that levelling and koineization are taking place. These processes affect the stability of the diglossic situation between Standard Modern Greek and Cypriot Greek, in that the more formal registers of the dialect display code-mixing and code-switching between Standard and Cypriot Greek as well as novel, hybrid forms and structures. Native speakers of Cypriot Greek are able to identify various registers of the dialect, which are taken to be distinct both from formal or ‘urban’ Cypriot Greek and from regional idioms. The above observations raise two interesting theoretical questions. Firstly, which are the linguistic and/or sociolinguistic criteria which allow for the delineation of various registers within a language or a dialect? Secondly, in cases of (receding) diglossia, is it theoretically plausible to think of (a subset of) the speech community as bidialectal? If so, is natural acquisition of both varieties the criterion for bidialectism, or is the extent of the use of each variety a more relevant criterion? This paper outlines the problems associated with the first question, and demonstrates their relevance for the construction of a theoretically plausible answer to the second.

1. Introduction

The functional convergence of the ‘High’ and ‘Low’ varieties (henceforth H and L varieties, katharevousa and dhimotiki in the case of Modern Greek), as correctly predicted by Ferguson (1959), has led to the resolution of Modern Greek diglossia. This, in turn, has led to further interesting developments with regard to the function of the variety called Standard Modern Greek (henceforth SMG) logia “erudite” or, alternatively, astiki dhimotiki “urban demotic” (Triantafyllidou 1938, Horrocks 1997) vis-à-vis other varieties of Greek. Although there is a great deal of relevant literature, it appears that the role of SMG in relation to regional Greek dialects is effectively that of the new H variety of Greek (Setat 1973, Moschonas 2002). The pervasiveness of SMG in education and the media has arguably been operative in the levelling of the language (see Kerswill & Williams 2000; Kerswill 2003) of other Modern Greek varieties. This new diglossic model, wi

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*The authors are grateful to Marilena Karyolemou, Anna Panayiotou, Marina Tserourdari and to the editors and reviewers for a number of valuable comments and suggestions. Matthias Kuppler provided some very useful pointers on developments within Turkish Cypriot similar to those discussed here. Special thanks are due to Xenia Hadjioannou for her endless patience in discussing the data with us and for countless helpful insights. The authors also wish to thank the numerous informants whose contributions this paper would not have been possible.
SMG as the H variety, is usually taken for granted in the case of the Greek-speaking community of Cyprus.

However, the description of the sociolinguistic situation in Cyprus in terms of this classic diglossic model fails to do it full justice. Recall that the classic Fergusonian definition of diglossia entails the co-existence of two codes which are distinguished both formally, i.e. on the basis of linguistic criteria, and functionally, since they occur within different domains of use (typically ‘public’ vs. ‘private’ or ‘formal’ vs. ‘informal’ situations). This bipartite distinction has, however, been argued against, as it can only account for part of the possible types of functional differentiation of the two varieties (see Gumperz 1981); this is especially true given the question of the ‘domain’ of language use (Fishman 1980), in view of the intricate patterns of language use which result from the particular dynamics of localized communicative situations. For example, in the interaction between students and professors in seminars and lectures in tertiary education, where the use of SMG is not merely expected but more or less imposed as the sole vehicle of academic literacy, the L variety may surface unexpectedly in order to signal a range of discourse/conversational functions (Tsiplikou 2006a). Similarly, Pavlou (2004) and Pavlou & Papapavlou (2004) have shown that there are numerous instances of the use of Cypriot in the media, i.e. in a domain which is typically reserved for H varieties.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss whether levelling and koinization, which are at work in the present-day Cypriot Greek dialect as a result of demographic and social changes as well as extensive contact with SMG, are also operative in effecting a shift from a regional dialect continuum to a register continuum within the Cypriot Greek dialect. A first attempt will be made to define linguistic and/or sociolinguistic criteria on the basis of which such register variation can be described. The paper will also address the issue of whether the more formal register(s) of the Cypriot dialect display properties of a mixed system, with heavy influences from SMG at the phonetic, morphological and syntactic level. The detection of these properties may in turn be applied to the definition of the linguistic profile of the bidialectal speaker.

2. Levelling, koinization and register variation

In his seminal work on Cypriot Greek (hereafter CG), Newton (1972) describes the dialect as the sum total of several regional varieties, distinguished on the basis of phonetic, morphological, syntactic and lexical isoglosses, with the idiom of the central plain of Mesoria and the capital, Nicosia, being seen as more standard. Newton’s approach effectively advocates the paradigm of a regional dialect continuum consisting of a set of basilects and a geographically defined acreol, with a concession to the fact that the acreol may also be determined on the basis of sociolinguistic criteria (cf. also Bickerton 1973, de Camp 1971, Chambers & Trudgill 1998). Newton’s research is valuable as it provides not only a meticulous linguistic description of spoken CG but also a wealth of data against which present-day CG can be compared, and recent changes tracked. Such a comparison reveals that (i) the regional idioms are on their way to becoming obsolete and (ii) a form of the Mesoria/ Nicosia dialect is the basis of the koiné. The contemporary CG meets the sociolinguistic criteria for koinization and concomitant levelling as set out in, e.g. Tuten 2003, has been argued for convincingly by Terkourafi (2005), who shows that criteria such as small population size, rapid demographic and social changes, due to the Turkish invasion and the war of 1974, which led to the separation of the Greek- and Turkish-speaking populations, weak network ties due to the emergence of an urban middle class with resulting increased speaker interaction (Siegel 2001) and younger speakers receiving rich and variable linguistic input (cf. also Siegel 2001, Kerswill & Williams 2000, 2005) apply in the case of the Greek Cypriot speech community. Crucially, contemporary CG meets a number of structural criteria for levelling and koinization, in that all contributing varieties, including that of Mesoria, on which the koiné is arguably based, are losing infrequent variants, and structural changes are taking place within the koiné. Below we provide a few examples of both processes.

At the phonetic level, there is loss of regional variants such as [v] in [vepə] “teeth” (a feature of both northern and western CG varieties; cf. Newton 1972: 105) in favor of the allophone [b], hence the preferred koiné form [beə] as opposed to SMG [beə]; similarly, the variant [i] in [teə] “want” is not a feature of the koiné, which favors [i], hence [teə] (cf. SMG [teə]). Obviously, koiné forms may also diverge from those of SMG; thus, the regional (Larnaka/Famagusta) [u] in e.g. [tux] “have.3S”, which is identical to SMG [ux], surfaces with the more widespread variant [u] in the GC koiné (for similar developments in a group of dialects of Dutch, see Huiskens 1998). The koiné has also undergone levelling, as is evidenced by the obsolescence of variants such as [ti] in, e.g. [pete:] “father-in-law”; the koiné favors the more widespread [peθe:] (but not the SMG [peθe:]; cf. Menardos 1969: 99, Newton 1983: 62, Terkourafi 2005: 327). Similarly, morphemes with a regional flavor are replaced by more widespread ones, e.g. the PAST 3P ending -unásin is now obsolete, having been replaced by the more common -undan; the Mesoria copula form enun “are.3P” is felt to be distinctively ‘Nicosian’ and is thus not part of the koiné, which favors the more widespread eni. Similar phenomena abound in the lexicon, e.g. the regional (Famagusta) venuo “throw.1S” is sitro or petasso in the koiné, and the regional (Mesoria) sirko “loath.1S” is anakata in the koiné (Terkourafi 2005: 328).

Structural changes as a result of levelling and koinization are also operational, and a number of them can be explained as influences from SMG. For instance, the koiné irreals verb form ennə ‘rəkumən “I would have come” is morphologically

1 Contosopoulos (1969: 105) reports eighteen Cypriot regional ‘idioms’.

2 A full discussion of these criteria and their applicability in the case at hand is beyond the scope of this paper; the reader is referred to Terkourafi (2005) for extensive discussion, as well as for evidence that early koinization took place in medieval Cypriot Greek.
(as well as phonetically) Cypriot, consisting as it does of the Cypriot future morpheme *eina* plus the Cypriot past imperfective *(e)kamun*, but syntactically it is modelled on the SMG structure *ita exromon*, which consists of the SMG future marker *tha* plus the SMG past imperfective *exromon*; the ‘older’, bona fide Cypriot, irreals forms are *itan na’*rto *was.3S + SUBJUNCTIVE MARKER + come.PERFECTIVE.1s* or even *iften na’rto *had.3S + SUBJUNCTIVE MARKER + come.PERFECTIVE.1s* (Tsipakou 2006b). At the phonetic level, inherited dialectal forms such as *a[n]e[m]* “siblings” become *a[ber]fe[m]* in the *koine* following a process that appears to be derivationally more ‘transparent’ in that the underlying fricative *[f]* in the consonant cluster (cf. singular *a[ber]fo*) is not elided (Malikouti-Drachman 2000). The *koine* form *a[ber]fe[m]* thus both parallels and diverges from the SMG form *a[ber]fo*[m].

Not all structural changes within the *koine* can be attributed to such direct influence from SMG, however; for example, CG displays clitic-second phenomena (Tobler-Mussafia effects — cf. Wackenagel’s Law), while SMG displays proclisis (unless the verb is in the imperative):

(1) a. *ita* ton b. *en* don *ita*

saw.1s him.CL.ACC NEG him.CL.ACC saw.1s

“I saw him”

“*I didn’t see him*” (CG)

(2) a. ton *ita* b. *en* don *ita*

him.CL.ACC saw.1s NEG him.CL.ACC saw.1s

“I saw him”

“*I didn’t see him*” (SMG)

(cf. Terzi 1999)

However, at least a subset of young *koine* speakers prefer enclisis with *wh*-words such as *indatos* “how”, especially so in clitic-doubling structures, as in:

(3) *indatos* lathom do to scalli?

how call.3S it CL.ACC the doggie.ACC?

“What do they call it, the doggie?”

(Tsipakou 2004)

Assuming that a structural change with regard to clitic placement in Cypriot Greek is at work, it is clear that this is not a change modelled on SMG, which requires proclisis in these syntactic environments, but rather a change that is internal to the *koine*.1

The above brief excursus on levelling and koineization raises the question of whether variation in CG might best be described in terms of a register continuum rather than a geographically defined dialect continuum, at least for a substantial subset of speakers, especially younger educated ones. There are several arguments in favor of the former option. First, while speakers seem to be aware of the fact that CG used to have a number of regional idioms, they are generally unable to identify them or mention any of their salient features; this is especially true of speakers born post-1974 (Pastella 2005). Speakers usually claim that they cannot identify a regional idiom, but on closer examination it turns out that the sole impressionistic criterion is intonation (*stin Pafon sirman in leon allos pos* “In Paphos they have a different kind of lilt” is a typical speaker comment in this regard; cf. Katsoyanou, Papapavlou, Pavlou & Tsipakou forthcoming). Second, the term *xorakika* “peasantry” seems to have lost its original generic meaning of “Cypriot dialect” (as opposed to SMG) (Newton 1972: 51) and is now used to denote a register containing features perceived as generically “regional”, i.e. practice a non-formal register of the *koine* shared by speakers irrespective of geographical provenance (Katsoyanou, Papapavlou, Pavlou & Tsipakou forthcoming). A further piece of evidence in favor of idiom levelling an concomitant register variation comes from the hyperdialectism attested in yon urban slang; Tsipakou (forthcoming) has shown that, in informal communicatio with their peers, younger educated speakers may use either obsolete regional forms, about whose meaning they are often unclear (e.g. *vori* “nule”), while younger speakers use as a pejorative term for ‘fat’ and/or ‘insensitive’, usual without knowing its original meaning) or produce constructed pseudo-regional forms in terms of phonetics and morphosyntax (e.g. *tf pu* to *tf* “far out”). Leaving aside the social-performative dimensions of this type of linguisti production within the context of youth subcultures, hyperdialectisms can be treated as indirect yet strong evidence both for levelling and for a shift from geographical to social/stylistic variation.

3. Levels of language use

3.1 Problems with establishing criteria for the delimitation of registers

Having made the claim for treating contemporary CG in terms of a registre continuum, we next turn to the establishment of linguistic criteria on the basis of which registers can be formally distinguished. This is a particularly challenging theoretical and methodological issue for monolingual and bilingual/diglossic situations alike, since boundaries between different varieties and different registers are usually fuzzy, particularly in the case of unplanned, informal face-to-face interaction. This is, in part, a reflection of the fuzziness of the boundary between different communicative situations and events.

Speaker intuitions may provide some indication that there are varying ‘levels’ or ‘forms’ of CG, which they name and comment on in various ways. This distinction among levels is based on the degree of convergence to (or divergence from) SMG. The names used for these different forms of the dialect reveal both the criteria for the distinction and speaker intuitions on the number of levels. At one end of the continuum lies the *vareta kipriaka* “heavy Cypriot”, which is also termed (*olla*, *telu*) *xorakika* “(very, totally) peasantry”, i.e. it is

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1 For similar developments in other south-eastern Greek dialects, see Drachman 1994.
sociolinguistically marked, though xorkaika is not identified with any particular regional idiom, as shown in Section 2 above. In addition, speakers acknowledge the existence of sosta, sistarismena kipriaka “correct”, “tidied-up Cypriot”, which they further distinguish from evgenika “polite” Cypriot, based on the relative degree of convergence to SMG. Finally, the term kalamaristika “pen-pusher speak” is the (frequently pejorative) term for SMG, i.e. it denotes a variety which is perceived as lying outside the continuum.

Leaving speaker intuitions aside, we will next attempt to put together a set of linguistic criteria on the basis of which registers can be delimited; this preliminary attempt is based on data from a small number of previous studies (Karyolemou & Pavlou 2001, Papapavlov 2004, Tsipplakou 2006a) and at this stage it should only be seen as a working hypothesis to be empirically tested against much larger sets of data. Our approach is based on the assumption that speakers have at their disposal phonetically, syntactically and/or semantically equivalent — or almost equivalent — forms, and the choice of a particular form can thus indicate a particular register or level of use. The equivalent forms or structures can then be treated as sociolinguistic variables (cf. Labov 1980, modile the problem that not all speakers have all the possible variants in their active repertoire). We will attempt to tackle a series of methodological problems relating to the identification of the variables and also to the detection of elements that cannot be variables and should thus be excluded. In the following discussion it will be shown that the latter distinction becomes particularly problematic, especially with respect to the more formal registers of CG, where diglossia often renders the situation unclear (see Section 4 below).

3.2 Towards the identification of variables and registers

With regard to the lexicon, it should be noted that CG contains a large number of words which come from SMG and can be treated as language-internal loans. Words like prospies “refugee”, biist” “administration”, nomarkia “prefecture”, do not mark the register as ‘high’ or formal, nor do they signal a move outside the boundaries of the CG dialect continuum, given that there is no choice involved; in such cases the Cypriot speaker obligatorily uses elements from SMG, and, the use of these elements is moreover perceived as register-neutral. A further interesting dimension is the fact that in CG there are scholarly words such as afipretos “I retire” praitia “provision”, which have SMG phonetics and morphology but do not exist in SMG. These Cypriot-specific developments are another aspect of koinéization and register variation, namely the development of a (limited) Cypriot-specific formal vocabulary. Cases where there is choice among semantically equivalent forms (e.g. okino (CG): lemenon (SMG) “lemon”, arfoteknos (CG): amepinos (SMG) “nephew”, c’el-e (CG): tufali (CG): cefali (SMG) “head”, vunno (CG): sirno (CG): petasso (CG): peto (SMG) “I throw”) are prime candidates for testing register variation. Two caveats are in order, however: first, we may anticipate cases where the use of the SMG form signals a move outside the Cypriot continuum; second, levelling and koinéization may well entail that words from CG regional basilects are in practice no longer part of the active repertoire of large numbers of speakers. Such complications can only be teased apart through rigorous empirical testing.

The detection of phonetic variables appears to be an easier task, as there seem to exist bona fide variables, that is to say elements with multiple realizations, the choice among which is free in the sense that it is not dictated by constraints imposed by the phonetic system.4 In these cases, the selection of one variant over the other is arguably regulated by register considerations. For example, further fronting of SMG palatals [c] and [g] is a typical CG, or, more generally, a southern/south eastern dialect trait; thus CG has a palatal affricate [ts] or an alveopalatal [ʃ] before the front vowels [i] and [e], where SMG has [c] at [c] respectively. However, CG also allows the variants [c] and [g] in the environment, at least for a large part of the vocabulary (e.g. [ts] or [g] “and [q] or [x] “hand”), and the choice of the variant identical to that of SMG do not signal a move outside the Cypriot continuum. In other cases, however, the choice of allophone is subject to systemic restrictions. Thus, [ʃ] surfaces when the syllabic structure is /siV/, i.e. /s/ + unstressed /s/ + vowel. In this case the sequence /si/ is obligatory realised as [ʃ], e.g. [tretokos] “four hundred”, fro underlying /tretosias/ (cf. Newton 1972: 113). In this case the use of the SMG variant /tretosias/ > [tretokos] normally signals a transition beyond the boundaries of the Cypriot continuum, and hence it can be treated as an instance of code-switching rather than continuum-internal variation (Katsyovano Papapavlov, Pavlou & Tsipplakou forthcoming). This is also evidenced by the fact that in more formal registers of Cypriot the preference is neither for [tretokos] nor for [tretokos] but for the alternative form [tretokos]. Such complication need to be teased apart when attempting to demarcate phonetic variables in relation to register.

In morphology and syntax, there is an equal gradation in choices which can be associated with register shifts, and there are also problematic cases where testive against large sets of data is required for the purpose of distinguishing bona fide variants from elements whose use signals a move beyond the continuum. The data from the corpus in Tsipplakou (2006a) provide a first indication that the variants of the negative particles en and men, namely den and min, respectively, are both part of the Cypriot continuum despite the fact that the latter two are identical to the SMG ones, and the choice of one over the other is determined by register/stylistic considerations. The third plural present tense morphemes -usin and -un stand in similar free allomorhopic relation, although -un is also found in SMG, while the SMG variant -ane signals a move beyond the continuum, as evidenced by its relative sparseness and its non-collocability with CG variants. Similarly, the absence of the ‘augment’ e, which used to be obligatory in CG past tense arguably no longer signals a crossing of the continuum boundary.

Syntactic variables can be identified in a similar manner. A typical example of a syntactic equivalence involves the twin strategies for forming wh-questions, i.e. 4 Morpho-syntactically constrained variation will be discussed below.
4. On diglossia and bilinguality

Participant observation confirms the intuition that speakers shift relatively smoothly from one variety to the other, especially in informal, familiar settings. This switching among speakers characterizes the diglossic character of the conversation. On the other hand, the number of different varieties in use is not determined by institutional factors such as education, etc. Further research must necessarily focus on this issue.
continuum as stylistic is directly related to this kind of ethnomographic approach to switching among potential choices. As was mentioned in Section 1, however, the use of the SMG variety is also attested in domains of use typically requiring the use of CG. This relates to the fact that, at least for some speakers, the SMG forms in (5e) and (6e) above were perceived as belonging to the OG continuum, i.e. as forming part of its acrolect.

The theoretical question which arises may then be stated as follows: are such instances cases of interchangeable use of forms that are part of the natural repertoire of the speaker, i.e. of variation, or are they cases of constant code-switching and a transition from a naturally acquired system, that of CG, to one non-naturally acquired one, that of SMG?

If we take the first approach, then we effectively place SMG on the acrolectal pole of the continuum or posit that the continuum includes a large part of SMG morphology and syntax. The second approach entails that a large part of SMG can be used quite effortlessly, and generally correctly, to signal particular communicative or stylistic functions, despite the fact that SMG does not belong to the continuum and is not a naturally acquired variety.

A provisional answer to this stage is the effortless use of morphosyntactic elements of SMG in everyday informal interaction may signify a re-structuring of the Fergusonian model of diglossia without necessarily implying the natural acquisition of the H variety. Research on code-switching and code-mixing has demonstrated that these are not necessarily directly linked to bilingualism in the narrow sense of the term. What is important in such cases is that increased language competence in two different systems is associated with quantitatively extensive and qualitatively different types of code-switching and code-mixing (Fishman 1980, Poplack 1980), an issue which requires extensive further research in the case of Cypriot Greek.

5. Conclusion

In this paper we have worked towards the hypothesis that the present-day Greek Cypriot dialect provides evidence in favor of a restructuring of Ferguson’s classic diglossic model and of a move from a regional dialect continuum to a register continuum. We proposed a preliminary division into registers within the continuum and identified a series of theoretical and methodological issues which face any kind of experimental or longitudinal research aiming at identifying the criteria for differentiation of levels in this given speech community. Finally, we raised the issue of the natural acquisition of part of the H variety as a criterion for the precise delimitation of the dialect continuum, as well as for the description of the language profile of the bidialectal speaker.

References