

4 Sociolinguistic Issues in Cyprus

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Abstract

This study discusses the major sociolinguistic aspects of the Greek Cypriot community of Cyprus. Initially, this presentation examines the key role of historical, sociocultural, and ideological issues in the formation of the linguistic reality in a particular country. In fact, Cyprus constitutes an instance of a bi-dialectal country. Due to historical, geo-demographical and economical changes that occurred both in the past and recently, the Greek Cypriot language community (in the areas control by the Republic of Cyprus) became multidialectal. The current paper attempts to demonstrate the “complicated” linguistic reality of Cyprus and discuss possible reasons which contributed to this multiplicity. This complicated reality is due to the coexistence of several language communities and several ideological preferences within the Greek Cypriot society. Precisely, among other reasons, the linguistic continuum that is found in the Greek Cypriot language community as well as the positive values for the low variety make researchers hesitate to describe the situation of Cyprus as a typical diglossia. Due to the large amount of variation, several sociolinguists (Karyolemou, Sivas) have identified a dialectal continuum within the Greek Cypriot community. Even though it is difficult to set distinct lines between different varieties, four broad varieties can be identified.

1. Aims of this study

The aim of the current paper is twofold: first, to sketch an outline of the current linguistic situation in Cyprus as this is presented through recent studies, with a special focus on the interrelations between the standard and the local varieties spoken on the island. Second, to investigate possible interconnections between issues of language and identity, as these interrelations often play a determining factor in the way the sociolinguistic situation in Cyprus is shaped and also on predicting possible tendencies for the development of new sociolinguistic norms.

This study has descriptively examined theories found in literature which attempt to enlighten the linguistic phenomena in Cyprus until 2009. However, there are more recent studies which shed lighter and provide with new findings regarding the sociolinguistic situation in Cyprus.

2. An overview on the current linguistic situation in Cyprus

2.1. Diglossia in Cyprus

As Moschonas (2002: 4) points out, Ferguson's (1959) pioneering study, called '*Diglossia*', made a major contribution to the study of bilingualism and initiated a new direction in this particular domain of Sociolinguistics. Ferguson (1959: 447), defines diglossia as the situation in which two varieties of the same language, usually a High and a Low variety, coexist in a speech community and each variety is used under different circumstances. In Ferguson's terms, the Greek Cypriot speech community uses two major varieties, Cypriot Greek (low) and Standard Modern Greek (high). Papapavlou (1998: 16) reports that Greek Cypriots use Cypriot Greek (henceforth CG) throughout their daily activities (in the family, with friends etc.) but code-switch into Standard Modern Greek (henceforth SMG) in, according to Arvaniti (2002: 6), '*the everyday serious discourse, the formal oral discourse and in writing*'. However, Arvaniti (2002: 5) argues that, to present the situation as a simple dichotomy between CG and SMG is an oversimplification. Similarly, Karyolemou & Goutsos (2004: 7) argue that the situation is more complex than a typical diglossia.

The complexity of the situation derives from the CG-speakers' inability to identify the variety they use as a dialect, accent (*ιδίωμα*), dynamic dialect or excessively dialect (Karyolemou 2000: 43). Papapavlou (2005: 8) states that CG differs from SMG primarily in vocabulary and phonology, with smaller differences in syntax and morphology. Traditionally, CG has been considered as one of the south-eastern dialects of Modern Greek (Newton 1972; Kontosopoulos, 2006), even though mutual intelligibility among the speakers of the two varieties is difficult and, sometimes rather impossible (Arvaniti 2002: 9). However, it is worth mentioning that the lack of intelligibility is not mutual; Greek Cypriots are familiar with SMG, since they learn it at school as well as from the surrounding context. Similarly, Arvaniti (2002: 8) highlights that the education system in Cyprus follows the same curriculum used in Greece, to the point of adopting the same textbooks. However, CG is the mother tongue of the Greek Cypriots, the language acquired at home and used from birth.

Major political and historical changes that occurred on the 19th century affected the linguistic reality of the island, mainly when it was set under the United Kingdom's administrative control in 1878. The public demand for political union

with Greece (1931–1960) was rejected by the British who forced policy against the union. Inevitably, the request for political union with Greece, with the British refusal and policy against the union, created a situation where SMG, CG and English became ideological. On this matter, Christodoulou (1997: 252) stresses the attempts of the English authorities to promote the use of CG in the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation (*PIK*). This attempt was initiated by the fact that the British considered and wished to highlight that CG was a distinct form of the Modern Greek language. Their actions were also based on their view that the use of a variety which is remarkably different from the Standard language of Greece simply does not support the request for union with Greece. In contrast, Greek Cypriots attempted to highlight their roots in the Hellenic world by stressing that CG originated from the language of Homer (Christodoulou, 1997: 252). The independence of Cyprus in 1960 and the separation of the population in 1974 that led to the transfer of 200,000 Greek Cypriot refugees from the north to the south of the island (also approximately 65,000 Turkish Cypriot refugees from the south to the north of Cyprus), as well as the general urbanisation brought to Cyprus by the socio-economical changes of the last thirty years, led to a new sociolinguistic reality in the island.

As Moschonas (2002: 2) declares, the complicated linguistic situation in Cyprus originates from people who strictly support SMG as the only authentic Greek form, viewing the dialect as an obstacle against the correct use of SMG in Cyprus. However, nowadays it is clear that CG is considered as a heteronymous Greek variety by both linguists and speakers of it. According to Moschonas (2002: 3), the criteria that determine a variety as homonymous or heteronymous are not linguistic but rather ideological.

In the past, researchers tended to examine the relationship between SMG and CG as the case of a classic diglossia, where the High variety is used in formal circumstances and in writing and the Low variety is used in the daily face-to-face interaction. Nevertheless, contemporary studies describe the situation using other terms. As Arvaniti argues, researchers over the past thirty years have recognised two distinctive varieties of CG: the urban CG and the village CG. In fact, recent studies (see Karyolemou 2000, Arvaniti 2002, Papapavlou and Pavlou 1998) have suggested the existence of a *generalised Cypriot Greek* (henceforth gCG), to use Terkourafi's (2005) term, which differs both from the local varieties and from SMG. Examining the attitudes of the Greek Cypriots towards the varieties they use, Karyolemou (1999: 209) stresses that Cypriots are now dedicated to their local variety, regarding it as a symbol of their differentiation from other Greeks and also

as a banner of their common local identity. Therefore, the legalisation of the use of the local variety (CG) by the Greek Cypriot society has strengthened its position against SMG, even though it has not changed its status as a geographical variety, thus as a dialect (Karyolemou, 1999: 209). Accordingly, Arvaniti (2002: 12) observes the main features of a ‘*Standard Greek as spoken in Cyprus*’ (or Cypriot Standard Greek), as it often differs from both CG *per se* and SMG. Karyolemou and Goutsos (2004: 8) also underline the emergence of a standard or urban variety of CG, although scholars have paid attention to the processes that emerge this form recently. The current linguistic situation in Cyprus can be described by the following schema:

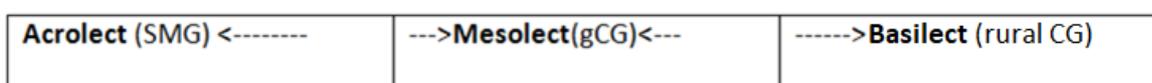


Figure 1: A general view of the dialect continuum in Cyprus

According to Karyolemou (2000: 46–47), the contact between a) the different local varieties, b) the local with the rural varieties, and c) the dialectal with the SMG form, contributed to the emergence of a bipolar schema. The latter is a dialectal continuum, which comprises, in the one pole, the *acrolect*, a regional norm of SMG that preserves the basic features (morphological, phonological and lexical) of the dialect and on the other pole, the *basilect*, which refers to the local varieties that preserve the marked and more characteristic features of the dialect. Between the two ends of the continuum there is one variety which is called *mesolect*. The *mesolect* is reflected by the other two varieties in all the linguistic forms. In some cases, the *mesolect* is more standard-centric, while in other is more dialect-centric, according to the particular context. Karyolemou (2000: 45) observes that the stabilisation of the *mesolect*, that is the emergence of common linguistic forms for the majority of Greek Cypriots, leads to the recognition of a Cypriot Standard Greek which is neither exaggeratedly Greek nor excessively Cypriot.

It should be noticed, though, that there is not a *superior-inferior* relationship among the varieties. Karyolemou (2000: 46) stresses that Greek Cypriots move along this continuum and they may employ, in certain cases, a variety closer to rural CG or in other cases a variety closer to SMG, as soon as they have the linguistic ability needed. The erasure of the indicative local linguistic forms by CG, the linguistic homogenisation of the new generations, the urgent use of the SMG in certain circumstances and the mutation of the social networks in Cyprus along

with the legislation of the use of CG by the people are the most significant issues that sketch the sociolinguistic reality on the island. (Karyolemou, 2000: 46).

In this sense, Arvaniti (2006: 2) refers to the increased contact between Cyprus and Greece today, as an issue that would have been more likely to lead to the convergence rather than to the divergence between the two Standards. There are two major theories which attempt to explain this situation. Firstly, according to Arvaniti (2006: 2) Greek Cypriots are not aware of the subtle differences between the two varieties therefore they often report that they speak SMG fluently and correctly. Secondly, the increased contact between Greeks (from Greece) and Greek Cypriots revealed the differences between the two places, a fact that gradually led to demystification and also raised feelings of fraternity amongst the local people and has contributed to the creation of a distinct Cypriot identity.

Arvaniti (2002: 6) also attempts to discriminate the situations describing the High and Low varieties. According to Arvaniti, sermons in church, personal letters, political speeches, University lectures, news broadcasts, newspapers editorials and news stories require the Standard form, while instructions to waiters, workmen and clerks, conversations with family, friends and colleagues, radio soap operas, cartoon captions, poetry and folk literature require the dialect. However, such discrimination is oversimplified since, as mentioned earlier, there are more than two major varieties in the Greek Cypriot speech community. In fact, one could suggest that the linguistic preferences of the speakers vary and as the prestige of the situation rises, the variety that is used changes. Particularly, as the context gets more formal, the use of the SMG increases. It is also worth mentioning that CG appears less frequently in formal contexts of situation. It should be pointed out that there is no constant form of the gCG, since its form is depended on the given situation. The different forms of gCG can be identified according to each case's linguistic (morphological, phonological, lexical) preferences. These preferences are more SMG-based or CG-based in formal and informal situations respectively.

2.2. Language attitudes

Ryan et al. (1982: 7, cited in Papapavlou, 1996: 54) define language attitudes as '*any affective, cognitive or behavioural index of evaluative reactions towards different language varieties or their speakers*'. Papapavlou and Pavlou (2001: 81) also state that language attitudes in most cases are not based on linguistic criteria.

The analysis of the attitudes of Greek Cypriots towards the varieties spoken in the island can be better comprehended with the following statements:

- ☞ the majority of the Greek Cypriots use the dialectical (urban or rural) forms when interacting with other Greek Cypriots. In addition, the use of the dialectical forms is not found only on occasions which call for low varieties; the dialect is also used in domains like official practices, public services and public speech, where the high varieties (like SMG) are usually used (Karyolemou, 1999: 209).
- ☞ it would be unrealistic to claim that in Cyprus certain people use the dialect largely and others use SMG exclusively. Additionally, Greek Cypriots are not a minority in their own country to feel inferior in the presence of a majority. Furthermore, the dialectical varieties are not the language of a minority as it happens in other instances of diglossia (Papapavlou, 1996: 56).
- ☞ Greek Cypriots are not socioeconomically and culturally deprived, in comparison to the rest of the Hellenic world (Papapavlou, 1996: 56).

Various attitudinal studies have demonstrated that the attitudes of Greek Cypriots towards the varieties they use are complicated. As Karyolemou (1999: 208) explains, even though Greek Cypriots generally judge CG negatively, particular instances have shown that they also express positive attitudes towards the local varieties, especially when their local identity is negatively evaluated. Papapavlou (1996: 61) investigated the language attitudes of Greek Cypriots, reporting that the speakers who use SGM were described as more ambitious, more intelligent, more interesting, more modern, more dependable, more pleasant and more educated than the ones who used CG. On the other hand, speakers of CG were described as more sincere, friendlier, kinder and more humorous (Papapavlou, 1996: 61). Similarly, according to Sciriha's research (1995) on language attitudes in Cyprus, only 3.54% of people responded that CG is more expressive than SMG and only 12.4% 'are proud of their dialect' (Arvaniti 2002: 7). Papapavlou (1996: 62) also wonders why Greek Cypriots hold favourable attitudes toward SMG and its speakers, and not such favourable attitudes towards the speakers of CG. He additionally presents various possible answers to this question:

- ☞ this attitude results from the Greek Cypriots' inability to express themselves fully in SMG and, consequently, respect SMG as something that they cannot attain.
- ☞ Cypriots desire to discard their agricultural past and adopt modern trends.
- ☞ it could be the fact that Greek Cypriots want to lean towards Greece, in order to fill the uncertainty that may exist in their ethnic identity.

☞ finally, it could be the result of state interventions, which encourage the use of ‘proper Greek’ (i.e. SMG) and discourage the use of a ‘degenerate’ CG.

(Papapavlou 1996: 62)

Another important issue which has been discussed by researchers is the Greek Cypriots’ attitude towards the preference of one variety over the other according to the particular context of situation. In this sense, several researchers underline Greek Cypriots attitudes towards people who use the ‘wrong’ variety in a particular situation. As Arvaniti (2002: 6) reports, Greek Cypriots use the term /*kalama'rizzo*/ which means ‘*speak like a person from Greece*’ in order to deride the behaviour of people who try to use SMG in situations that call for CG. Arvaniti also states that Greek Cypriots consider this behaviour pretentious and which attracts ridicule. Additionally, Greek Cypriots are equally ready to deride speakers who use CG in situation that call for SMG (Arvaniti, 2002: 6). These speakers are often called uncivilized, impolite and uneducated.

Sivas (2003: 3) presents interesting empirical instances which illustrate the relationship between the varieties used in Cyprus. She points out the statements of several people about the two major varieties, as matters that reveal attitudinal issues. Indeed, one of the subjects describes the people who use SMG in cases that call for CG as arrogant, while another person believes that a person can be more polite by using SMG and avoiding the use of village CG indicative expressions. A third person believes that a mainland Greek, who obviously uses SMG, is more likely to lie or manipulate using the advantage of a better language competence (Sivas, 2003: 4). Sivas also underlines the nature of the language attitudes of Greek Cypriots. She stresses that, even though there are more negative comments towards the local variety, Greek Cypriots consider this variety as an issue of familiarity and common identity (Sivas, 2003: 4–5).

Sivas (2003: 5) explains that Greek Cypriots simultaneously have positive and negative feelings towards the two varieties, due to different reasons in each case. This miscellaneous nature of the Greek Cypriots’ attitudes creates a balanced situation amongst the two varieties. In fact, speakers attempt to employ particular features, neither excessively marked as features of SMG, nor extremely marked as dialectal. This fact leads us again to the emergence of a variety that, as mentioned earlier, is different from basilectal CG and at the same time is not identified as SMG. As several studies indicate, this new variety (gCG) is the daily speech-code of urban Greek Cypriots. It seems that the emergence of the new variety protects the people from being derided as pretentious /*kalama'ristika*/ or

peasantry /*xo'rkatika*/. Sivas (2003: 6) also stresses that by using a variety closer to SMG and another variety closer to CG, Greek Cypriots satisfy the two identities they want to maintain. Sivas (2003: 7), who seems to agree with Arvaniti (2002), claims the emergence of a new standard variety, Cyprus Standard Greek, which is used in formal circumstances. During informal circumstances though, Greek Cypriots employ the urban CG. These two varieties, according to Sivas (2003: 7), are being stabilized. Sivas (2003: 7) calls this phenomenon as ‘*dual stabilisation*’, which is relevant with the ‘*dual identity*’ phenomenon of the Greek Cypriots and explains the inconsistent attitudes of the people. It is worth presenting the schema as it appears in Sivas’ (2003: 8) discussion about the linguistic situation in southern Cyprus today:

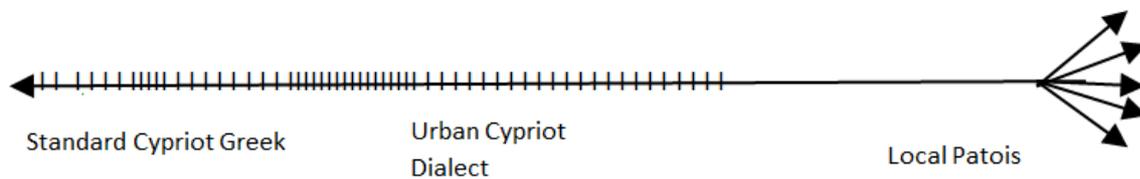


Figure 2: The dialectal continuum in Cyprus as presented by Sivas (2003: 7)

So far, this study has identified three different theories that attempt to describe the linguistic situation in Cyprus. Initially, the traditional view considers the situation in Cyprus as common diglossia, where a high (SMG) and a low (CG) variety appear in separate circumstances. The second approach concerns a dialectal continuum, arguing towards the existence of one new variety (the mesolect) which is, in certain cases more similar to SMG and in other cases more similar to basilectal CG. Finally, the third hypothesis, examining the attitudes of the Greek Cypriots towards their language, underlines the emergence of two new varieties, Cypriot Standard Greek and the urban CG, which are being stabilised in the Cypriot society.

2.3. Language policy and planning

There is a limited number of studies in the area of language policy and planning in Cyprus, existing in limited knowledge in this particular field (Karyolemou, 2008: 1). In this section a brief discussion will be presented on the most significant issues which concern language policy and planning in Cyprus, based on a review of the relevant literature. As Wardhaugh (2006: 357) states, ‘*language planning is an attempt to interfere deliberately with the language or one of its varieties*’. Karyolemou (2008: 1) examines language policy and the language planning

separately. She defines language policy as the set of intentions, principles and purposes which determine the language attitudes of a speech community. Language planning, according to Karyolemou, is the use of particular means and practices in order to achieve a particular language policy. Although many scholars (such as Weinstein, 1980 and Auer, 2001) have examined language planning as a governmental procedure, Karyolemou (2008: 2) points out that other institutions or organisations have applied their own language planning in Greek Cypriot society. Language planning, for instance, can be influenced by the civil services or, as Karyolemou (2008: 2) states, by the church community.

The first governmental inference in the language policy of Cyprus was in 1960, when the Republic recognised both Greek and Turkish as the two official languages of the island. According to Karyolemou, this official arrangement treated the two languages equally in domains such as legislation and administration, judiciary and the logotypes of the Republic (Karyolemou, 2008: 3). Again, the separation of the island in 1974 has led the leaders of each part (Greek and Turkish Cypriot) to implement a policy in favour of the assimilation of the Cypriot Greek and Cypriot Turkish to Standard Greek and Standard Turkish respectively. Karyolemou (2005: 28) stresses that the relationship between Turkish and Greek after 1974 is ‘a *zero degree of bilingualism*’.

Language policy and planning in Cyprus have passed from a *laissez-faire* period to a legal regulation era (Karyolemou, 2001: 43). Even after the independence of Cyprus in 1960, the traces of the colonisation by the British in the domain of language were visible for many years. English was the language of public administration, legislation and the judiciary, while certain private schools were using English as the language of instruction. Knowledge of English became compulsory for civil servants for many years after the end of colonisation. However, Karyolemou (2001: 44) reports that there has always been a *de facto* policy within the Greek Cypriot community in favour of the Greek language. Greek was the language of instruction in primary and secondary public schools; it was taught at schools and was widely used by the media. Actually, this is the period that Karyolemou refers as the *laissez-fair*; a period that approximately lasts between 1960 and 1986. On the other hand, the translation of Cypriot legislation into the Greek language initiates an era of linguistic interventionism in favour of the Greek language (Karyolemou, 2001: 43). Between 1986 and 1994 the Greek Cypriot community applied a policy to improve the status and the use of the Greek language in Cyprus. As Karyolemou (2001: 45) states, the period from early mid-1980s to mid-1990s is characterised by a language protectionism. This

protectionism is due to the unstable situation that followed the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974. Several examples which show the protectionism of the Greek language in Cyprus are presented by Karyolemou (1994: 256–257). The topics concerning status planning were:

- ☞ the choice of Greek and Turkish (and not English) as the official languages of the new established University of Cyprus;
- ☞ the reinstatement of the teaching of Ancient Greek in secondary schools;
- ☞ the use of Greek in public signs and in all types of advertisements;
- ☞ extension of the status of Greek by offering it as an object of study in private post-secondary school establishments where English is considered to be the medium of education;
- ☞ extension of the status of Greek in Justice and Legislation;
- ☞ consequent restriction of English from domains such as Higher Education or Legislation.

It is also important to note that during the period of interference in language planning in Cyprus with the policy in favour of the Greek language, there was also a latent but intentional attempt of a narrower use of the dialectal forms in the society. The language planning in Cyprus seems to pass from a relatively linguistic assimilative ideology to a relatively linguistic pluralism. According to Wardhaugh (2006: 347), '*linguistic assimilation is the belief that everyone, regardless of origin, should learn the dominant language of the society*'. Linguistic pluralism, on the other hand, is the recognition of more than one language and, as Wardhaugh (2006: 347) suggests, it also takes a variety of forms. The linguistic pluralism in Cyprus can be described as individually based and partial. In these terms, despite the attempts for language assimilation, the Greek Cypriot society generally follows a pluralistic ideology in language planning, whereas certain aspects of life can be conducted in more than one language or variety.

As Karyolemou (2008: 6) reports, the selection of a particular language policy and planning should consider the opinions of the speakers targeted by the planners. Moreover, Karyolemou suggests two dimensions that analyse the language policy and the planning; the policy and the planning which are promoted by several institutions, such as governments and organisations, in order to solve a linguistic problem in society, are very different than the policy and the planning used by individual speakers (Karyolemou, 2008: 6). Karyolemou calls the former '*macro-level dimension*' of language policy and the latter '*micro-level dimension*' of language policy. Since organisations and individual speakers have particular,

discrete motivations for choosing and promoting a language or a variety, the perception of the language used varies according to the needs of the particular speaker or group of speakers. Indeed, the motivations of a government could be the conservation and strengthening of the national identity of the citizens. In contrast, the individual motivations of the speakers may have to do with their easier communication or the financial profit which may derive from the use of a particular variety (Karyolemou, 2008: 6). To return to the situation of Cyprus, the official attempts to reduce the use of the English language with the intentional ignorance of the dialectical forms, led to the strengthening of the Greek language in a macro-level perspective. However, the particular motivation of CG-speakers led to the maintenance and in certain cases strengthened the use of the English language in specific domains of life. As Karyolemou claims, the case of the standardisation of the toponyms (place names) of Cyprus, sketches accurately the problems which derive from the two different dimensions of language policy and planning. The attempt to erase everything that strongly proclaims the local accent (*'saillant variable'* according to Trudgill, 1986) has been considered as offensive and against the Cypriots' local identity.

It seems that the language planning today in Cyprus depends on the linguistic choices of the speakers according to the particular circumstances. Certain factors that seem to influence the language policy of Greek Cypriots are the context of situation (formal-informal), the interlocutor, the statuses of the varieties and finally the political and ideological preferences. Furthermore, Greek Cypriots seem to be aware of this situation, while they want to protect both their local and national identity and both the local and the standard forms. Equally, and after the accession to the European Union in 2004, Greek Cypriots know well that English is the language used in certain domains, such as business, that could lead them to a general progress. A recent phenomenon which proves that the status of a variety used in Cyprus is highly depended on financial motivations is the increasing (the last ten years) use of Russian language in the signs of the souvenir shops of the second biggest town of the island, Limassol.

2.4. Language identity and ethnicity in Cyprus

Ferguson summarises the situation in Cyprus after 1974 claiming that:

This ethnonationalist indoctrination of the communities via media propaganda and biased curriculum material in segregated schools still fuels the fires, keeping the conflict alive in the minds of generations who live in isolation from their enemy (Ferguson, 2001: 118, in Zingi, 2009: 2).

When Greek Cypriots are requested to define their national identity, they are expected to reply that they are firstly Greeks and secondly Greek Cypriots. The first response underlines the implicit linkage of Cyprus with Greece, while the second response indicates that Cypriots are Greeks but with certain peculiarities (Sivas, 2003: 2). According to Zingi (2009: 7), the Ottoman (1571–1878) and British (1878–1959) occupations have determined the modern history of Cyprus. Zingi (2009: 6) also points out that the biggest problem in Cyprus is the fact that not all Cypriots embrace the island as theirs. Greek Cypriots look up to its ‘motherland’ Greece, having the same national anthem, using the Greek flag (and a Cypriot one as well) and celebrating the same national days. These issues led to the construction of a Greek-oriented national identity and impeded the formation of a clear Cypriot identity.

As Sciriha (1996: 100) claims, in order to attempt to interpret the intricate linguistic case of Cyprus, one has to look at the socio-political forces that are at play in the island. She mainly underlines the attitudes of the two major political parties (*AKEL* and *ΔΗΣΥ*) of Cyprus towards the potential unification with Greece. She also states that, while the left-wing party (*AKEL*) struggled for the independence of the island from both Greece and Turkey, the right wing (*ΔΗΣΥ*) was in favour of the unification of Cyprus with the mainland Greece. Consequently, some supporters of the left-wing party want to consider themselves as Cypriots first, while some supporters of the right-wing party wish to consider themselves as Greeks who happen to live in Cyprus (Sciriha, 1996: 100–101). However, the ‘idea’ of the union (enosis) with Greece started to fade especially after 1974, and it completely disappeared when Cyprus became a full member of the European Union in 2004. This debate about the identity of Greek Cypriots seems to have important effects on today’s linguistic situation of the island. At the present time Greek Cypriots have finally recognised both the similarities and dissimilarities with other Greeks and have also realised the linguistic problem that derives from the use of two different varieties in their society.

Subsequently, the emergence of a new variety, namely gCG, bridges the gap between SMG and (rural) CG. Simultaneously, gCG seems to conciliate the different identities that Greek Cypriots share. Additionally, the existence of more than one varieties in the Grecophone sphere in Cyprus is due to the Greek Cypriots’ uncertainty about their identity. Accordingly, the attempt to protect the local dialect, even though the attitudes towards it are negatively oriented, is due to the fact recently, Greek Cypriots have started to build a local Cypriot identity. As Sciriha (1996: 99) reports, the extensive use of the local dialect in the everyday life

interactions by the Greek Cypriots indicates their desire to strengthen the feeling of belonging in the same group or culture. To use Joseph's (2004: 94) terms, the case of Cyprus can be described as '*an intelligent way of keeping the nationalist flame burning while making sure it does not set fire to the bank*'. This means that Greek Cypriots have found a way to maintain their national identity, which is comprised of both Greek and Cypriot, while, they are also ready to employ various linguistic codes (SMG, English or CG) in order to achieve their particular goals.

2.5. Processes of koineisation in Cyprus

The examination of the language use in particular domains of the Greek Cypriot society has led to the conclusion that in dialect mixture and code-switching situations it is difficult to separate and clearly classify the varieties used. Tsiplakou (2008: 404) points out that the dialectal continuum that occurs in Cyprus consists of hierarchical scales, which are classified according to the style-levels (registers). The question arises concerns the stabilisation of the mesolectal scale of the continuum while this issue has been extensively examined by several researchers (such as Trudgill, 1986) and has recently gained great interest among Greek and Greek Cypriot researchers (see Terkourafi 2005, Tsiplakou 2006).

As Trudgill (1986: 107) reports, extensive mixture or contact among different dialects may lead to a huge amount of variability. The enormous amount of linguistic variability leads to the formation of a new (intermediate) dialect, through the process of koineisation. Koineisation, according to Trudgill, is the '*reductions of the forms available*'. Moreover, Siegel (cited in Terkourafi, 2005: 320) describes koine as:

Koine is a stabilised contact variety which results from the mixing and subsequent levelling of features of varieties which are similar enough to be mutual intelligible, such as regional and social dialects. This occurs in the context of increased interaction or integration among speakers of these varieties (Siegel, 2001: 175).

According to Terkourafi (2005: 321), koines are characterised by four structural features; these features are *mixing, leveling, simplification and reallocation*. The coexistence in the koine of variants which originate in different varieties is called mixing. Levelling and simplification refer to the reduction process that occurs during koineisation. Levelling is mainly the loss of attrition of infrequent variants, while simplification concerns the re-formation of grammatical categories toward greater economy and symmetry. Finally, the redistribution of variant functions,

where different varieties become specialised for different functions, is called reallocation (Terkourafi, 2005: 321). However, as Terkourafi admits, these processes also occur in other types of language contact, such as pidgination and creolisation. What makes koineisation differs from other types of language contact are the sociohistorical circumstances surrounding it (Terkourafi, 2005: 322). Terkourafi also points out the basic sociohistorical conditions which are required for koineisation. Some of them are: the isolation and the small size of the community, the weak network ties between community members and the formation of a common identity.

As Tsiplakou (2008: 403) claims, the levelling of the local and marked varieties is one of the more characteristic changes occurring in modern CG (gCG). Moreover, as the current study has proclaimed, instances of mixing and reallocation can be found easily while investigating the language use in Cyprus. Terkourafi (2005: 327–330) subtly outlines certain structural features of the gCG, in order to determine whether this variety constitutes a koine. After examining certain possible outcomes from language contact (dialect retreat, standardisation, dialect levelling), Terkourafi (2005: 334–337) finally decides that this new CG constitutes a koine. Additionally, the sociohistorical conditions in Cyprus, thus the isolation and small size of the island and the demographic changes after 1974, support her viewpoint.

According to Terkourafi (2005: 362), structural traces of the new urban variety (gCG) are found in manuscripts of medieval administrative and literary texts. Moreover, Hinskens (2001: 213, cited in Terkourafi, 2005: 310) has added CG to the 39 cases of koineisation, an issue that strengthens Terkourafi's view about the processes of koineisation in Cyprus. However, as Terkourafi (2005: 337) admits, *'the process of koineisation is ongoing in Cyprus and the final words on this issue have hardly been said'*. It is true that several factors influence the stabilisation of a koine in Cyprus. The extensive borrowing from other languages (English mainly), the more or less successful efforts by the speakers to approximate SMG, the speaker's desire to keep or drop local patois which leads to an enormous amount of variability inside the community, make the stabilisation of a koine a hard procedure. However, as Sivas (2002: 7) reports, a dual stabilisation procedure seems to occur nowadays in Cyprus. The two varieties which are being stabilised are the urban CG variety (used in informal circumstances) and the Standard Greek variety as received by Greek Cypriots and used in formal circumstances. Therefore, it is not improper to claim that an unusual phenomenon of stabilisation of two

koines takes place nowadays in Cyprus. Nevertheless, further exhaustive research is required before generalizations can be made.

3. Concluding remarks

Considering the analysis of the current article, one can evidently argue that language constitutes an essential part of the society. Any attempt to describe language without taking social issues into consideration is insufficient. Cypriot linguistic reality has been highly affected by the sociohistorical changes which occurred in Cyprus after 1955. The political problem, that is the occupation of the 37% of the island by the Turks, has led the Greek Cypriots to strengthen their Greek identity. Additionally, the socio-economical changes that followed, such as the general urbanisation and the turn of Cypriot economy to the domain of services, gave a new direction to the linguistic issues of Cyprus. The effects of the sociohistorical changes as well as the ambivalent attitudes of the people towards the varieties used in Cyprus as well as the absence of a clear language policy have led to an intricate situation that is difficult to be described efficiently.

The theory of the existence of a dialectal continuum has been discussed by the majority of the contemporary researchers. As this study indicates, the dialectal continuum of Cyprus consists of two major mesolectal varieties: the urban CG and the Standard Greek as it is received and adjusted by Greek Cypriots. These two varieties, according to Sivas (2003: 7), are being stabilised. In the acrolectal end of the continuum one can find SMG, which is the main source of the formal mesolectal variety. On the basilectal end of the continuum, there is rural CG, which is the main source of the urban CG variety. Even though most researchers argue that SMG became artificial in Cyprus, this study suggests that it can be found in several domains such as the written press and certain TV programs. On the other hand, basilectal CG is mainly used by the older Cypriots who live in rural areas or on TV and radio programs for humorous purposes.

The existence of these varieties satisfies the dual identity of the Greek Cypriots. In addition to this, the language policy implemented by the authorities in favour of SMG has gained no supporters since the linguistic preferences of the Greek Cypriots are depended on individual motivations. Although dialect plays a crucial role in the Greek Cypriot community, little attention has been paid to its role by governmental organisations in domains such as the education and the media. This is due to the fact that in Cyprus there are people who still believe that the acceptance of a Cypriot Greek Koine would influence Cypriot's Greek identity.

Besides, as Karyolemou (2000: 47) underlines, it seems that there is no political will to provide the dialect with any support. CG sub-varieties belong to the varieties which are neither weak nor strong but lie in a fragile balance. Therefore, it is difficult to predict or determine their evolution.

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