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ERASURE AS A MEANS OF MAINTAINING DIGLOSSIA IN CYPRUS*

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The Greek speech community of Cyprus is characterized by classic diglossia, with the local varieties forming the L, and Standard Greek the H. It is argued here that this diglossic situation is maintained against what the sociopolitical and economic conditions would predict, because the prevailing linguistic ideology—according to which Cypriots are ethnically Greek, an ethnic identity that is primarily defined by the use of (an almost uniform) Greek language—has led to the erasure of diglossia. The case of Cyprus shows that linguistic ideology and the role of language in indexing ethnicity may be crucial for the maintenance of diglossia in some linguistic communities and may prove more powerful than socio-economic conditions in sustaining the linguistic status quo.

1. Introduction

The Greek speech community on the island of Cyprus is characterized by diglossia, in which Standard Modern Greek¹ (henceforth *Standard Greek*) acts as the High and Cypriot Greek (henceforth *Cypriot*) as the Low (Moschonas, 1996; Tsipplakou, 2003). It is shown here that this diglossic situation persists under conditions that would typically have resulted in either more widespread use of L or the demise of diglossia altogether in favor of L. It is argued that the current outcome is related to the prevailing linguistic ideology in Cyprus which has led to erasure, the denial of diglossia, because of the heavy emotional load that recognizing its existence would entail, due to the fact that language and ethnicity are inextricably linked in this community.

* This paper is a companion to Arvaniti (this volume a). Although the papers compliment each other, they are written in such a way that each can be read independently of the other; for this reason, some introductory sections (e.g. the historical background) show a degree of overlap.

The ideas in this paper are based on living and observing the linguistic situation in Cyprus and discussing facets of it with Cypriot speakers in the period 1995-2001, as well as on the study of documents that portray the popular and scholarly views of this situation, such as press pieces, letters to the editor, editorials and scholarly articles from the past twenty years. I would like to thank first my students at the University of Cyprus, who often discussed with me their views on and reactions to the linguistic situation. Thanks are also due to Yoryia Aggouraki, Georgios Georgiou, Yiannis Ioannou, Marilena Karyolemou, Anna Panayotou, Yannis Papadakis and Anna Roussou for discussing various aspects of this work with me and providing me with data and sources. Finally, I thank Ad Backus, Brian Joseph and Kit Woolard for comments on an early version of this paper.

¹ The term Standard Modern Greek is used here to refer to the variety of Greek, based on Dimotiki but with a Katharevousa component, that emerged as the standard after the abolition of diglossia in Greece in 1976 (Trudgill, 2000). A discussion of this development is beyond the scope of this paper, but see Frangoudaki (1992; 2002) and Trudgill (2000).

Before the reasons for the maintenance of diglossia in Cyprus are further examined, it is necessary to briefly present the historical and linguistic background to the current situation. This is all the more important because the arguments presented here hinge on recognizing the linguistic situation in Cyprus as diglossic. Although this characterization appears clear to some researchers (Arvaniti 2002; Moschonas, 1996; Tsiplakou, 2003) it is not shared by all; many scholars describe the linguistic situation in Cyprus as a “dialectal continuum” of some sort (Davy *et al.*, 1996; Goutsos & Karyolemou, 2004; Karyolemou & Pavlou, 2001), or as bidialectalism (McEntee-Atalianis & Pouloukas, 2001; Papapavlou, 1998; Papapavlou & Pavlou, 1998). Because of this divergence of opinions (which is discussed in more detail further below) and because “the term ‘diglossia’ has been applied, with different degrees of conviction, to several types of speech community” (Winford, 1985: 345), a brief presentation of the linguistic situation in Cyprus is in order.

2. Brief Historical and Linguistics Background

Cyprus, which had been a British colony since 1925, became independent in 1960 after years of anticolonial struggle. Independence was in fact against the wishes of both the Greek majority, who had fought for *enosis*, that is union with Greece, and the Turkish minority, who had advocated *taksim*, that is the partition of the island along ethnic and religious grounds. Independence was followed by clashes between the two communities, which in 1974 culminated in a coup by nationalist Greek Cypriots, and the subsequent military invasion of the island by Turkey. The on-going Turkish military control of the northern third of Cyprus (where the majority of the Turkish Cypriots now live) has led to the de facto partition of the island (a situation that the 2004 ascension of Cyprus to the European Union may eventually resolve). In this paper I deal only with the linguistic situation in the non-occupied areas of the Republic of Cyprus, where the majority of the population (91.7%, according to the 2001 census) now consists of native speakers of Cypriot. (The relationship between Standard and Cypriot Turkish in the Turkish-occupied part, discussed in Georgiou-Scharlipp & Scharlipp (1998) and Kizilyürek & Gautier-Kizilyürek (2004), presents interesting parallels to the situation in the Greek-speaking part of the island.)

Cypriot has always been described as a dialect of Greek (Horrocks, 1997; Kontosopoulos, 2001; Newton, 1972a), and is perceived to be so by the Cypriot speakers themselves (e.g., Sivas, 2003; Tsiplakou, 2003). Despite the pervasiveness of this view, the two varieties are sufficiently different to be mutually unintelligible without adequate previous exposure, as the accounts of lay speakers in Papadakis (2000) and Tsiplakou (2003) amply demonstrate. (It should be noted, however, that lack of intelligibility is not mutual: due to their greater exposure to Standard Greek, Cypriots are much less likely than Greeks to experience comprehension problems during cross-varietal communication.) Cypriot is further divided into *town speech*, and *village Cypriot* or *village speech* (Newton, 1972b). Town speech—also known as *urban Cypriot* (Karyolemou & Pavlou, 2001) and *local Cypriot Koine* (Kolitsis, 1988)—is the variety of Cypriot used by educated town dwellers in informal situations (Karyolemou, 2000, quoted in Sivas, 2003). It is taken by the speakers themselves to be “**the** Cypriot dialect par excellence [emphasis in the original]” (Karyolemou & Pavlou, 2001: 119). Urban Cypriot is juxtaposed to a geographically based dialectal continuum (Newton, 1972b), the

varieties of which are collectively known as village speech. Village and town Cypriot form a continuum with village Cypriot as the basilect and town Cypriot as the acrolect of L (for similar views see Davy *et al.*, 1996; Goutsos & Karyolemou, 2004; Karyolemou & Pavlou, 2001).

Although, as mentioned, the vast majority of the population speaks Cypriot, it was Standard Greek that was chosen as the official language of the state when Cyprus gained its independence (“Standard Greek” in 1960 was Katharevousa, the H of Greek diglossia; when diglossia was abolished in Greece in 1976, and Dimotiki, the L of former diglossia, replaced Katharevousa as the official language of Greece, it was also adopted by Cyprus as its official language).² However, independence does not mark the beginning of the current relationship between Standard and Cypriot Greek in Cyprus. As Karoulla-Vrikki (2004) documents, the same status quo between the two varieties was present in Cyprus under British colonial rule as well, since Cypriots used their local variety informally, but were schooled in Standard Greek (Katharevousa) by teachers that arrived from Greece for this purpose. Since the teaching of Standard Greek, rather than Cypriot, was the norm from the late 19th c. onwards (Karoulla-Vrikki, 2004; Papadakis, 2003), it is reasonable to assume that the relationship between Standard Greek and Cypriot in Cyprus has been stable for over a century.

This relationship bears all the hallmarks of classic diglossia as defined by Ferguson (1959). First and foremost, Cypriot is the variety that is spoken natively by the population, while Standard Greek is learned only through formal schooling. In addition, it is clear that Cypriot and Standard Greek have distinct functions in Cyprus. These functions are divided between the two varieties along the lines described by Ferguson: Standard Greek is used in formal situations, particularly in writing (with the exception of poetry, which is written in Cypriot); Cypriot is used in all informal situations and all oral interactions (Karyolemou & Pavlou, 2001; Pavlou & Christodoulou, 2001). Further, as mentioned, the two varieties are related and are also perceived to be so by the speakers themselves (on the importance of this factor, see Winford, 1985). In addition, there is a general perception among the speakers that Standard Greek is more prestigious than Cypriot (among many, Papadakis, 2003; Papapavlou, 1998; Pavlou & Christodoulou, 2001; Sciriha, 1995), a perception that is reinforced by the fact that, unlike Standard Greek, Cypriot is not codified and standardized to any extent (e.g., it does not have a generally accepted orthography).

It is also important to note that in response to the communication problems that diglossia can create, particularly for those not fluent in H, intermediate forms have emerged in Cyprus (on this tendency of diglossic communities, see Ferguson, 1959; 1996; Hary, 1996; Rosenbaum, 2000; see also Arvaniti, 2002, and Sivas, 2003, for similar conclusions about the Cypriot situation in particular). The presence of such intermediate codes has given rise to the idea mentioned earlier that Cypriot and Standard Greek form a continuum, and are not in a diglossic relationship. There is, however, good reason to believe that the speakers perceive all forms, even those with mixed features, in a dichotomous manner, that is either as Cypriot or as Standard Greek, and react

² (Standard) Turkish is also recognized as an official language of Cyprus, together with Greek. Today, however, the use of Turkish in the non-occupied areas is nominal: Turkish is used in some, but not all, official documents, while according to the 2001 census, only 0.05% of the population chose Turkish as the language they speak best.

negatively to uses that do not conform to the tacitly prescribed domains of the two codes: Cypriots use the term *kalamarizo* ‘speak like a person from Greece’ (*kalamaras* being a derogatory term for mainland Greeks)³ to describe the linguistic behavior of Cypriots who use Standard Greek in situations that call for Cypriot, a behavior that is considered pretentious and can attract criticism and ridicule (Newton, 1983; Pavlou & Christodoulou, 2001; Sivas, 2003). Cypriots are equally ready to deride speakers who use Cypriot in circumstances that call for Standard Greek; such speakers are often said “not to know Greek” (e.g. *Simerini*, 22 March 2002), a type of remark often made in diglossic communities about speakers who use L when H is required (cf. Haeri, 2000).

3. The Stability of Cypriot Diglossia

Although the linguistic circumstances in Cyprus leave little doubt that this is a case of classic diglossia, explaining why this status quo is still stable in this particular speech community is problematic, since the conditions that typically sustain diglossia are not met in Cyprus any longer.

One such condition is the restriction of literacy in H to a small elite (Ferguson, 1959, 1996; Hudson, 2002; Schiffman, 1996; Winford, 1985). Restricted literacy is not a characteristic of today’s Cyprus. According to the Republic of Cyprus Statistical Service, in 1997 literacy stood at 94% among persons aged 15 years or older; 40% of those aged 20 years or older had a high school diploma, while 17% had a tertiary level degree. According to the World Bank, in 2002, literacy stood at 97%, while secondary school enrollment was 85%. Although data from other diglossic communities are scarce and do not always lend themselves to direct comparison, Table 1 is indicative: the Cypriot figures for secondary and tertiary education are below those of the United States (included for comparison), but they are much higher than recent figures from several other diglossic communities (with the exception of Switzerland).

In addition, Cyprus does not have a body of prestigious literature composed in H, which it would wish to preserve because of its religious or cultural significance, as happens with Arabic (among many, Haeri, 1997, 2000, 2003) and Tamil (Schiffman, 1996). *Modern* Greek literature cannot be said to play this role in Cyprus and it is certainly in no danger of being lost. Classical Greek literature, on the other hand, could be argued to be more “naturally” preserved by Greece (where it largely originated), by more extensive teaching of Classical Greek, or by the use of Cypriot, which is a conservative variety retaining many Homeric and Classical words that have disappeared from Standard Greek (as many Cypriot speakers will readily mention; Tsiplakou, 2003). It is also significant that the need to use Standard Greek in order to better preserve the Classical Greek literature never enters into debates about linguistic issues in Cyprus; if anything, journalists and intellectuals argue in favor of more extensive teaching of Classical, not Standard Greek, on the basis that “without Classical Greek, nobody can claim to know Greek well” (*Simerini*, 2 April 2002), since “Classical Greek [...] is the mother-nurse of Modern

³ The word *kalamaras* literally means ‘person with quill/scribbler’; it is believed that it was first used by Cypriots for Greeks because the latter came to the island in the late 19th and early 20th c. as teachers (reinforcing the view that diglossia between Cypriot and Standard Greek dates from at least the late 19th century). According to some, today’s pejorative sense of the word derives from the negative feelings that Cypriots developed towards Greeks after the 1974 Turkish invasion for which many hold the Greeks responsible (Papadakis, 2003).

Greek” (Simerini, 2 November 2001). In short then, none of the main factors said to maintain diglossia appears to be valid in Cyprus, at least not to an extent that would create compelling conditions for diglossia maintenance.

Table 1: Literacy rate (percentage of those aged 15 years and over who can read and write) in 2002, and percentages of secondary and tertiary level education in various diglossic communities (Cells are left empty when no information is available).

	Literacy rate	Secondary Education	Tertiary Education
Cyprus ¹	97%	40%	17%
Haiti ²	52%	--	--
Sri Lanka ³	92%	7.2% (maximum estimate)	--
Jordan ⁴	91%	32.8% (basic, vocational and secondary education)	17%
Algeria ⁵	69%	5% (registered students)	1.67% (registered students)
Tunisia ⁶	73%	29.7% (of those aged 10 years or older)	5.8% (of those aged 10 years or older)
Saudi Arabia ⁷	78%	--	--
Switzerland ⁸	--	56.8%	24.2%
U.S.A. ⁹	--	83%	25%

¹ source: *The World Bank Group and Republic of Cyprus Statistical Service*

² source: *The World Bank Group*

³ source: *The World Bank Group and Sri Lanka Department of Census and Statistics*

⁴ source: *The World Bank Group and Jordanian Department of Statistics*

⁵ source: *The World Bank Group and Algerian National Office of Statistics*

⁶ source: *The World Bank Group and Institut National de la Statistique, Tunisia*

⁷ source: *The World Bank Group*

⁸ source: *Swiss Federal Statistical Office (<http://www.statistik.admin.ch>)*

⁹ *Federal Interagency Council on Statistical Policy (<http://www.fedstats.gov/>)*

On the contrary, it appears that the socioeconomic conditions prevailing in Cyprus today would be more likely to lead to the demise of diglossia. As Hudson (2002) notes, such conditions relate to social developments, particularly the modernization of a society which leads to greater demand for literate individuals. Another factor is the reluctance to use H because of its sociopolitical connotations. For example Barbour (2000: 162) suggests that one of the reasons why the use of Standard German is declining in Switzerland is that “since the Nazi period and the Second World War [...] a German identity was seen as undesirable for the Swiss.” Frangoudaki (1992) presents similar arguments for the demise of diglossia in Greece, demonstrating that Katharevousa lost its prestige when it became associated with the colonels of the military junta that ruled Greece from 1967 to 1974.

Both these conditions are present in Cyprus today. On the one hand, Cypriots are prosperous, educated and even surpass Greeks on certain indices of development, such as economic growth rate, per capita income, and use of personal computers among the population, according to the World Bank. As mentioned, literacy is high, while according to the World Bank the country is ranked 19th in the world in terms of per capita income. In addition, in the years since independence, Cyprus has changed from a traditional

society based on agriculture into a modern service-based economy with a high demand for literate workers (Solsten, 1993).

Furthermore, there is an undercurrent of resentment towards Greece, due to its role in the 1974 coup that led to the invasion of the country by Turkey (Papadakis, 1998; 2003). This change of attitude towards Greece and the Greeks since the struggle against British colonial rule is evident in today's political climate. In the 1996 and 2001 legislative elections and in the 2004 Euroelections, AKEL, the communist party, which is largely opposed to union with Greece, and DISY, the conservative party traditionally supporting greater ties with Greece, each gained approximately 30% of the vote. This percentage represents an increase of almost 100% for AKEL since the 1976 election and has been steady in the past fifteen years. Such electoral results are an indication that the idea of a separate Cypriot identity is now accepted by a substantial part of the population. Under such circumstances, the expected result would be the decline of diglossia and eventually its replacement by the L. Indeed such a solution would be a way of ascertaining the country's independence, typically an essential element of post-colonial societies like Cyprus (see e.g., Roberge, 1990, on Afrikaans).

The need to ascertain independence or to index a distinct ethnic identity has been mentioned as another reason for the decline of diglossia (Ferguson, 1996; Hudson, 2002; Schiffman, 1997). Yet, using Cypriot as the official language of Cyprus has never been seriously contemplated: one point on which both conservative and communist politicians and supporters appear to agree is that Standard Greek should remain the official language of the state. The press is a good indicator that there is agreement on this point. Several topics relating to language (such as the role of English in Cyprus, and language-related educational reforms), are often discussed in articles and editorials, frequently leading to heated exchanges across newspapers (see Karyole mou, 1994, for a classification of topics). However, one point that seems to never be contested is that Standard Greek is and should remain the official language of the Republic. References are often made to "our language" a term that clearly refers to Standard Greek, not Cypriot. In some cases the connection is explicit, as when one finds references to "our common modern-Greek language" (*Phileleftheros*, 12 May 1994), or assertions that Greek is the "mother tongue of the [Cypriot] people and official language of the state" that make no distinction between Cypriot and Standard Greek (*Simerini*, 23 November 1997). In fact, suggestions that Cypriots may not be loyal to Standard Greek, or contemplate replacing it with Cypriot as the official language of the state can provoke outrage: when the Greek professor of linguistics George Babiniotis published an article in a Greek newspaper admonishing Cypriots not to abandon Standard Greek in favor of their own variety (*To Vima*, c. 1994), his article was followed by several irate editorials and letters from the public to Cypriot newspapers of various persuasions, all vehemently denying that such ideas had ever been contemplated in Cyprus; indeed, his interpretation of the situation was seen as an affront to the "Greekness" and patriotism of Cypriots (for details on the use and significance of the terms *elinas* 'Greek' and *elinismos* 'Greekness' in Cyprus, see Papadakis, 1998).

Finally, another factor that could also have facilitated the demise of diglossia is the unprecedented contact between Greece and Cyprus in the past fifteen years or so. Until the early 1990s, despite the traditional links between the two countries, there was little contact between the speech communities themselves (Terkourafi, 2003). Today, however,

Cypriots travel often to Greece for business and tourism (as an indication, the number of daily flights between Greece and Cyprus has more than doubled in the past decade). In addition, Cypriots have more contact with Standard Greek through the media: all Greek magazines and newspapers circulate in Cyprus, the Greek satellite channel (NET) is available, and the local channels broadcast popular Greek programs (games, chat shows, comedies, soap operas). In such cases of extensive contact, convergence is expected, and this is precisely what has been observed regarding the influence of Standard Greek on Cypriot. Convergence has affected not only the structure and vocabulary of Cypriot (Karyolemou & Pavlou, 2001), but has also extended to the adoption of certain politeness devices from Standard Greek, specifically the use of diminutives and the T/V distinction (Terkourafi, 1997; 2001).

According to Schiffman (1997), a plausible outcome of convergence in a diglossic situation would be the replacement of L by H. Specifically Schiffman observes that H may replace L “if H is the mother tongue of an elite, usually in a neighboring polity.” (p. 207). Although Standard Greek is the prestige language of a neighboring state (even if not, strictly speaking, the language of an elite), there does not seem to be a move in this direction in Cyprus. On the contrary, Tsiplakou (2003) notes a return to marked village Cypriot forms in the speech of trendy young urban Cypriots, not a move towards Standard Greek. Nor, however, do we see the alternative scenario envisaged by Hudson (2002: 30), namely “L through a process of structural convergence resulting in the emergence of a new standard more closely related to certain educated varieties of the vernacular.” Although the H used in Cyprus today is different from the Standard Greek used in Greece and influenced by urban Cypriot (Arvaniti, 2002), it is still undeniably a variety of Standard Greek not of Cypriot, and perceived as such by the speakers themselves, in that its use would be unacceptable in face-to-face interaction between Cypriots (Karyolemou & Pavlou, 2001; Sivas, 2003).

In short, diglossia in Cyprus appears to be currently stable, though the sociopolitical circumstances suggest that it should have been resolved either in favor of the H, or more plausibly in favor of the L. I argue below that the reason why diglossia is maintained in Cyprus is related to the fact that its existence is not recognized because the prevailing linguistic ideology had led to its erasure and hence to its sustained existence.

4. Diglossia Erasure

The denial of diglossia is apparent both in the press and in several other publications, scholarly and otherwise, that deal with linguistic issues. As mentioned earlier, there is a rich literature on matters linguistic in Cyprus. Among these articles there are many that deplore the use of “bad Greek” and provide lengthy lists of “mistakes” and their “corrections” (among many, *Phileleftheros* 12 May 1994; *Simerini*, 14 August 1994; *Simerini*, 9 December 2001; *Simerini*, 22 March 2002; *Simerini*, 20 March 2003). Interestingly, the authors of these articles appear not to recognize that Cypriot may affect the use of Standard Greek in Cyprus (as would be expected in a diglossic situation, in which speakers are expected to use two distinct but closely related varieties, one of which is effectively a second language for them). If Cypriot is mentioned in this literature, this is done in order to deny its significance. And Cypriot is taken to play an insignificant role because it is said to have become identical to Standard Greek. For instance, in *Phileleftheros* (c. 1999) we find claims to the effect that it is impossible to expect the

“resurrection of our dialect which inevitably succumbs to the Panhellenic Koine,” and assertions that the only thing left today of the Cypriot dialect is “its phonetic guise.” Similar views according to which Cypriot is barely distinguishable from Standard Greek are expressed by lay speakers interviewed by Sivas (2003) and Tsiplakou (2003); these speakers effectively claim that Cypriot is now not much more than a regional accent (while at the same time they may admit difficulties in understanding Standard Greek).

A similar stance is adopted in scholarly work, where effort is made to avoid the characterization of the Cypriot linguistic situation as diglossic (with the above-mentioned exception of Arvaniti 2002, Moschonas, 1996, and Tsiplakou, 2003, all native speakers of Standard Greek).⁴ Thus Davy *et al.* (1996: 131) argue that the linguistic varieties used in Cyprus today form a “post-diglossic continuum;” however no reference is made as to when or how the situation ceased to be diglossic, though it is likely that the authors refer to the abolition of Katharevousa in Greece, not to the situation in Cyprus as such (as mentioned earlier, since independence the official language of Cyprus has been the variety that had official status in Greece at any given time). Goutsos & Karyolemou (2004) and Karyolemou & Pavlou (2001) also describe the linguistic situation in Cyprus as a continuum, with village Cypriot as the basilect, Standard Greek as the acrolect, and town Cypriot as a variety that is distanced from both and located around the middle of the continuum. Papapavlou (1998: 18), on the other hand, suggests that Cyprus is “bidialectal” not diglossic. His characterization is reiterated in Papapavlou & Pavlou (1998), and also taken up by McEntee-Atalianis & Pouloukas (2001: 20) who claim that the situation in Cyprus is “rather different from many other settings” which have been characterized as diglossic *or* bidialectal (the authors do not make a distinction between the two terms). McEntee-Atalianis & Pouloukas argue that this difference is due to the fact that Cypriots use Standard Greek not only in formal situations, but also informally, if their interlocutor is from Greece. This usage, however, can hardly be said to constitute an argument against characterizing the linguistic situation as diglossic: rather, it is best seen as an instance of accommodation (Giles & Powesland, 1997), and an implicit recognition that an addressee who is a native speaker of Standard Greek is unlikely to understand “pure” Cypriot.

The fact that the differences between the two varieties are downplayed to such an extent by all involved is undoubtedly linked to the linguistic ideology prevailing in the Greek-speaking world, according to which Greek, unlike Latin, has remained uniform throughout its long history and has given rise to minimal dialectal variation. Thus Pontic and Tsakonian, varieties that are “sufficiently different from all the others that linguists

⁴ The term *diglossia* itself—which is familiar to educated Cypriot speakers due to the great preoccupation with matters linguistic, the wealth of popular articles written by linguists and addressed to the general public, and the exposure to the well known former diglossia of Greece—is also avoided in the press; if it is mentioned this is done in order to deny that it exists in Cyprus. For example, in an article that succinctly presents the functional differentiation of Standard Greek and Cypriot, it is also stated that it would be a “grave mistake” to characterize the situation in Cyprus as diglossia, because Cypriot is a dialect of Greek and not a distinct language (*Phileleftheros*, c. 1999). The avoidance of the term diglossia could well be related to the meaning this term acquires when used in Greek: *diglossia* in Greek is formed by the roots for *two* and *language*, so it is naturally interpreted as meaning the use of two languages by the same community (in Greek it is impossible to distinguish between *bilingualism* and *diglossia* using a single term for each concept). Thus, the term diglossia itself is loaded, given the prevailing linguistic ideology that views Standard Greek and Cypriot as barely distinct.

might want to suggest that they are actually different languages” (Trudgill, 2000: 245-6) are still considered dialects of Greek, as shown in the classifications of Newton (1972a) and Kontosopoulos (2001). As Trudgill (2000) also notes, this is not just a linguistic classification; it also reflects how the speakers perceive themselves: “[b]oth Tsakonian speakers and Pontics [...] regard themselves and are regarded as Greeks” (p. 246).

This ideology, which Christidis (1999) calls the “linguistic mythologies” of Greeks, naturally leads to the desire to ignore differences between varieties considered to be instantiations of the Greek language; in other words, it leads to erasure, a process that Irvine and Gal (2000: 38) describe as the outcome of linguistic ideologies rendering “some [...] sociolinguistic phenomena invisible” by “simplifying the sociolinguistic field.” This is precisely what we find with Greek and Cypriot: as mentioned earlier, the two varieties are not mutually intelligible without lengthy prior exposure (or without a considerable degree of accommodation on the part of the Cypriot speakers), yet the differences between them are either downplayed or more often altogether ignored. This is evident when, for example, Cypriot speakers report that “Greek, Cypriot, it’s the same thing” (Sivas, 2003: 8), or when Greek film distributors refuse to distribute a Cypriot film to Greece upon realizing that the dialogue would be unintelligible to the audience without subtitles (which are used in Greece only for foreign language programs and films; reported in Papadakis, 2000).

The erasure of linguistic differences is particularly important in the Greek speaking world, because language is today a crucial part—perhaps the defining part—of Greek ethnic identity (Trudgill, 2000). As Trudgill (2000) notes, the role of language in indexing Greek ethnicity is certainly related to the fact that Modern Greek is an *Abstand* language, which makes ethnicity a straightforward concept for most native speakers of Greek: “Greeks are [considered to be] those whose mother tongue is Greek, whether they are citizens of Greece or are part of overseas communities, such as the long-established communities in Cyprus, Italy, the Balkans, Syria, Egypt, Turkey, Ukraine, and Georgia, or the more recently established communities in areas such as Australasia and North America” (Trudgill, 2000: 245).

This straightforward view of ethnicity does not characterize only Greeks in Greece, but also Cypriots, who see themselves as being ethnically Greek and define their ethnicity on the basis of language (this applies even to many of those who espouse a distinct Cypriot *national* identity at some level). This feeling that Cypriots are ethnically Greek is reflected in Cypriot itself, which has the superordinate term *elinas* that refers to Greeks in general, and two subordinate terms that refer to Greeks from Greece in particular, *eladitis*, and the pejorative *kalamaras* (for a discussion, see Papadakis, 2003). In contrast, Standard Greek has only the term *elinas*, which is used either in the broad sense of ‘person of Greek descent’ or in the narrow sense of ‘person from Greece,’ depending on context. Cypriots tend to be very sensitive to the distinction they make between *elinas* and *eladitis* and can be offended if a person from Greece uses the word *elinas* in its narrow sense, since this usage implies to them that the speaker does not think of them as fellow Greeks.

In addition, strong reactions are evident whenever Cypriots feel that their ethnicity is questioned. For example, in 2004 a report on education reform caused furor because it referred to Cyprus as a “nation-state,” a statement that implied a distinct ethnic identity for Cypriots and Greeks. (Non-speakers of Greek should note that *nation* and *ethnicity*

are formed using the same root in Greek, being *ethnos* and *ethnikotita* respectively, whereas *nationality* in the sense of *citizenship* is an unrelated word, *ipikootita*; this is probably one of the reasons why, as Trudgill (2000: 251) notes, “[w]ithin Greek society at large there is a commonly encountered failure to distinguish between citizenship and ethnicity.”) Similarly, *Simerini* (25 November 2004) discussed negatively a Council of Europe report on linguistic policy in Cypriot education which mentioned that “[t]he Greek Cypriot community has a remarkable homogeneity[; t]here is a strong feeling that it is part of the Greek nation.” This kind of statement was seen with wonderment (the title of the relevant article was “They do not recognize that we are Greeks!”) at the idea that anybody could not know or could question that Cypriots feel that they are ethnically Greek. The same report, which recommended that fewer teaching hours be devoted to the teaching of Greek in Cypriot schools, was seen as provocative, insulting and sarcastic because it suggested that Cypriots need Modern Greek for practical reasons.

Now, this ideology that emphasizes the role of language in indexing a common ethnicity among all Greek-speaking communities not only erases the substantial differences between Standard Greek and Cypriot—since recognizing and highlighting them would be tantamount to denying that part of Cypriot identity which is defined by speaking “Greek”—but also allows speakers to interpret the relationship between Standard Greek and Cypriot as a case of standard-with-dialects. In my experience, most lay Cypriot speakers tend to view their situation exactly in this way; e.g., they often mention that their situation is analogous to that of speakers in areas of Greece known for their distinctive accent, such as Corfu or Crete (even though the differences between these varieties and Standard Greek are limited, at this point in time, to mostly phonetic and phonological features, and would be unlikely to lead to communication problems between interlocutors; Kontosopoulos, 2001). This interpretation obviously erases the large differences between Cypriot and Standard Greek and the different status of Standard Greek in Cyprus, as compared to its status in, say, Corfu or Crete. In turn, the erasure of diglossia allows the status quo to remain unchanged under conditions that typically warrant its demise, because the existence of diglossia can simply be ignored.

It remains of course unclear whether the linguistic situation in Cyprus will continue to be diglossic in the long term. Currently, the situation is stable, but there are also signs that some aspects may be changing. In particular, Pavlou (2004) suggests that in some cases town Cypriot may be used in the media, or at least that there is heavy admixture of Cypriot and Standard Greek when speakers try to use the latter in formal, oral discourse (a type of situation that has become much more common since the explosion of the media in the mid-1990s); in addition, Arvaniti (2002) shows that Standard Greek as used in Cyprus has begun to diverge markedly from Standard Greek as used in Greece. These new linguistic practices, coupled with the fact that Cypriots are beginning to forge a distinct national identity may eventually lead to the end of diglossia, though it seems unlikely that this will happen while Standard Greek indexes ethnicity (as opposed to nationality) in Cyprus. Despite such possible changes, however, the current situation clearly shows that considerations of ethnicity and the view that the speakers have of their own linguistic situation may be more important than socioeconomic and political conditions in maintaining diglossia.

5. Conclusion

I have shown that diglossia is maintained between Cypriot and Standard Greek in Cyprus under social conditions that do not warrant it, and have argued that the reason for the maintenance of the linguistic status quo in this community is the erasure of diglossia. Erasure is dictated by the prevailing ideology which allows only for small differences between Cypriot and Standard Greek; downplaying the differences between the two varieties allows the speakers to interpret their relationship as non-diglossic but, rather, as a typical case of standard-with-dialects, and thus to maintain the status quo. The linguistic situation of Cyprus shows that linguistic ideology and the role of language in indexing ethnicity may be crucial for the maintenance of diglossia and occasionally may prove more important than socio-economic circumstances.

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