

Parents' and students' language attitudes towards two proximal varieties: the case of the bidialectal setting of Cyprus

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Περίληψη

Στην παρούσα έρευνα διερευνώνται οι γλωσσικές στάσεις μαθητών Ε' τάξης Δημοτικού και των γονέων τους απέναντι στις δύο συγγενείς γλωσσικές ποικιλίες που ομιλούνται στην ελληνόφωνη Κύπρο μέσα από ημι-δομημένες συνεντεύξεις. Οι συνεντεύξεις των γονέων έδειξαν ότι παγιωμένα στερεότυπα περί ορθότητας και ανωτερότητας συγκεκριμένων γλωσσικών τύπων εμφανίζονται στο λόγο τους και συχνά αντανακλώνται στις αξιολογήσεις των παιδιών τους. Εντοπίστηκαν επίσης αντιφατικές τάσεις από πλευράς των γονέων ως προς τη θέση της μη-πρότυπης ποικιλίας στην εκπαίδευση. Οι μαθητές πιστεύουν στην αξία της μητρικής γλώσσας τους τονίζοντας τη λειτουργία της ως εκφραστή της ταυτότητάς τους. Παράλληλα φαίνεται η επιρροή από τη διαίωνηση στερεοτύπων περί ορθότητας και καταλληλότητας της πρότυπης ποικιλίας.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: γλωσσικές στάσεις, γλωσσικές ιδεολογίες, Κυπριακή Ελληνική, Κοινή Νέα Ελληνική, διδασκαλικά περιβάλλοντα.

1 Introduction.

Language attitudes are powerful; they can perpetuate and consolidate linguistic prejudices, biases and stereotypes. They are also socially constructed. One is not born with language attitudes. Instead people “shape their linguistic beliefs under the strong influence of language ideologies circulating in their community” (Papazachariou et al., 2018: 128). Early in their lives children are exposed to beliefs about the linguistic varieties in their community through their home environment, their school and the media. Crucially, beliefs about language acquired early in life are less likely to change later (Garrett, 2007: 14). Thus, it is important to examine children's language attitudes and the attitudes of the people close to them. In this article, we report the *preliminary* findings of a study investigating the language attitudes of fourth grade pupils in two primary schools in Limassol, Cyprus, and their parents.

It is well documented in the literature that the government-controlled part of Cyprus is a diglossic setting. Cypriot Greek (henceforth CG) is the native variety of Greek-speaking Cypriots. It is usually associated with sociolinguistically ‘low’ functions (Tsiplakou and Ioannidou 2012) and characterised by internal variation (Tsiplakou, Armostis, and Evripidou 2016). Recent studies argue for ongoing processes of levelling of CG sub-varieties, especially post-1974, and the emergence of a CG koiné (Tsiplakou 2014). Standard Modern Greek (henceforth SMG) is the High variety; an official language that enjoys overt prestige and is the preferred code for formal occasions and the language of education.¹ However, recent studies speak of a fast-growing (c)overt prestige that the contemporary CG koine is gaining (e.g., Karyolemou and Pavlou 2001; Papapavlou and Sophocleous 2009; Tsiplakou 2003).

¹ For a detailed description of the sociolinguistic situation in Cyprus see among others Tsiplakou, Armostis, and Evripidou (2016), Fotiou (2019), Karatsareas (2018).

Research on children’s attitudes is growing but studies on both children’s and their parents’ language attitudes are scarce. To the best of our knowledge, there are no studies investigating both students’ and parents’ attitudes in Cyprus. Instead many studies focus on the attitudes of students and sometimes their teachers’ (e.g., Ioannidou 2004; Kyriakou 2015; Sophocleous and Wilks 2010). This is in line with a trend noted in the international literature (Ball and Bernhardt 2012).

The study on language attitudes we report on here was conducted in 2013 as part of a larger project on the effects of bidialectal education on pupils’ performance in CG and SMG (Ayiomamitou 2018; Ayiomamitou and Yiakoumetti 2017). The language attitudes part of the study involved the conduct of twelve interviews to three different groups of people (teachers, parents and pupils) and the distribution of 362 questionnaires. Here we focus on the interviews of the parents and the pupils with an aim to discuss the main themes that emerge from the interviews. Analysis of the data from the questionnaires along with a juxtaposition of those findings with the findings from all the interviews is conducted in Fotiou and Ayiomamitou (forthcoming).

The interviews were conducted by the first author of this paper. They had a semi-structured format and lasted approximately 20–30 minutes each. They were audio-recorded after written informed consent was given from the participants, before they were transcribed and analysed following a thematic analysis method. Below we provide information about the participants’ age and education level.

Child Participants			Parent Participants		
Child	Age	Education	Parent	Age	Education
1. Marinos	10	5 th grade	Marinos’ mother	41	BA
2. Niki	10	5 th grade	Niki’s mother	40	BA
3. Elias	11	5 th grade	Elia’s mother	49	BA
4. Marina	11	5 th grade	Marina’s mother	46	BA
			Marina’s father	51	MA

Table 1 | The participants

In what follows, we first examine the pupils’ attitudes towards CG (section 2) followed by an examination of the attitudes of their parents (section 3) before we discuss the findings and conclude (section 4).

2 Pupils’ attitudes towards CG

Overall, the pupils show that they value their mother tongue. For all of them, ease and intelligibility is the main reason why they prefer to use CG at school.

(1) Μαρίνα: Άμα μιλά Κυπριακά [ο δάσκαλος] ας πούμε εκφραζόμαστε πιο καλά άμα μιλά Ελληνικά προσπαθούμε τζιαι μεις να μιλήσουμε Ελληνικά τζιαι ας πούμε δυσκολευκόμαστε λλίό.²

When the teacher uses Cypriot, we can express ourselves better; when the teacher uses Greek, we also try to use Greek, and we find it a bit hard to do so.³

² All names are pseudonyms, and discourse in square brackets is added by the authors.

³ Free translation is provided for all the examples.

CG is not only easier; it is also a part of their identity. Marina's comment below is particularly revealing:

(2) Αρέσκει μου [η κυπριακή] γιατί τζιόλας τα Ελληνικά ένεν τόσο, τα δικά μας εν πιο ενδιαφέρον νομίζω [...]. Επειδή ο καθέννας έσει τον τρόπο που μιλά, είμαστε στην Κύπρο οφείλουμε να μιλούμε τζιαι τη γλώσσα μας ένεν; γιατί όι; I like Cypriot because Greek is not that [she can't find the right adjective here], ours is more interesting, I think [...]. Because everyone has their own way of speaking; we are in Cyprus, we have to use our language, don't we? Why not?

Marina sees CG as part of her identity. It is interesting how she feels so strongly about the fact that everyone has their own way of speaking and it is their duty to speak their language even though she is only eleven years old.

However, despite the aforementioned positive attitudes towards their mother tongue, when it comes to writing, CG poses a problem, as shown below:

(3) Ιόλη: Αν εγράφαμε όπως μιλούμε, νομίζεις θα ήταν πιο εύκολο;
If we were to write the same way we speak, would that be easier?

Νίκη: Όι, στα Κυπριακά να το γράφω όπως μιλώ όι εν θα με βόλευκε γιατί ας πούμε το «τζιαι», μια λέξη που εν στα Κυπριακά, δυσκολεύκει με στο πώς να τη γράψω.

No, writing in Cypriot would be an inconvenience because, for example, “and” [pronounced [tʃe], /tʃ/ is absent in SMG], which is a Cypriot word would be difficult to write down.

CG is regarded as an oral variety (Karatsareas, 2018: 414) despite the fact that it is nowadays used widely in writing in computer-mediated communication albeit in a romanized form (Themistocleous 2010). Since there are no widely accepted writing conventions and Greek Cypriots are not taught by anyone how to write in CG, it is no wonder why the pupils feel this way.

The remaining themes that emerged from the pupils' interviews demonstrate how they have been influenced from prescriptive attitudes towards CG and the overt prestige attached to SMG in Cyprus. SMG is seen as an imposed, dominant and necessary variety. For these pupils, this is always expressed through imagined future scenarios.

(4) Ιόλη: Η δασκάλα τι θέλει να μιλάτε;
What does your teacher want you to use?

Νίκη: Ελληνικά αρέσκουν της παραπάνω, τζιαι πρέπει να μάθουμε Ελληνικά.
She prefers Greek, and we have to learn Greek.

Ιόλη: Είπε σας ποτέ γιατί;
Has she ever explained why?

Νίκη: Έ γιατί μπορεί να μας συμβεί τίποτε, αν μας πει μια λέξη ο Ελλαδίτης μπορεί να μεν την καταλάβουμε.
Um because something might happen to us; if a person from Greece talks to us, we might not be able to understand.

(5) *Ιόλη*: Ναι, αλλά νομίζεις ότι αν μάθεις τα Ελληνικά καλά έχεις κάτι να κερδίσεις;
Yes, but do you think you have something to gain by learning to use Greek well?

Ηλίας: Ναι, γιατί μπορεί να πας στην Ελλάδα να σπουδάσεις ή να πηγαίνουμε συχνά στην Ελλάδα οπότε αν δεν ξέρεις Ελληνικά καθόλου άμα πάεις στην Ελλάδα εν θα μπορείς να συνεννοείσαι.
Yes, because we may go to Greece for our studies, or we might visit Greece often in the future, so if we don't know any Greek, we won't be able to communicate.

The two varieties are not mutually intelligible. Speakers of SMG cannot understand CG without prior, lengthy exposure to this variety, while Greek Cypriots can understand SMG because it is the language of their education. What is interesting in examples (4) and (5) is how children are convinced for the necessity to learn SMG: they might need it in the future in order to be understood when interacting with Greeks outside Cyprus. Interestingly, they do not mention cases where they will need the standard variety in Cyprus. SMG is seen as an outside variety. However, its role in the Greek Cypriot linguistic community should be emphasized by both parents and teachers. It would make more sense for these pupils to understand the usefulness of this variety in their future everyday lives in Cyprus (e.g., use of SMG in written communication in professional settings) instead of its usefulness in frightening imaginative future scenarios of not being understood in another country.

The pupils also believe that SMG is more correct and appropriate to use than CG, as illustrated below:

(6) *Μαρίνα*: Προσπαθούμε να απαντούμε Ελληνικά αλλά έσπει φορές που εν μας φκάνει.
We try to answer in Greek, but we are not always able to do so.

Ιόλη: Πως αντιδρά η κυριά;
How does your teacher react to this?

Μαρίνα: Εν αντιδρά.
She doesn't.

Ιόλη: Εν σας κάμνει παρατήρηση;
She doesn't reprimand you for that?

Μαρίνα: Όι, αλλά αρέσκει της παραπάνω να μιλούμε Ελληνικά, πιστεύκει εν πιο σωστά.
No, but she prefers it when we use Greek, she thinks it is more correct.

Data from Sophocleous (2011) also demonstrate how in many cases teachers do not directly say that they prefer SMG forms, but praise its use at the expense of CG. It is clear from examples such as the one above that pupils learn that SMG is considered to be the correct form of Greek at school, and this is done at the expense of their mother tongue.

SMG is also seen as appropriate in specific domains and for specific topics. Below we see that while the (reported) language used by the teacher is CG, pupils are

expected to use SMG to answer questions related to their lesson (see Ioannidou 2004 for similar findings).

(7) Ιόλη: Οι δάσκαλοι πως μιλούν;
Which variety do your teachers use?

Ηλίας: Ε ας πούμε στην επιστήμη ο κύριος μιλά μάζ πάντα Κυπριακά αλλά, ας πούμε, άμα εννα του απαντήσουμε σε μια ερώτηση που μας έκαμε πρέπει να του μιλήσουμε λλίο επιστημονικά.

Um, our science teacher, for example, always uses Cypriot but, when we reply to his questions we need to speak a bit scientifically.

Ιόλη: Και αυτό σημαίνει;
And, what does this mean?

Ηλίας: Ε Ελληνικά, αλλά που να έχουν σχέση με την επιστήμη.
Um, we have to use Greek, but Greek that relates to science.

The idea of appropriateness is also associated with politeness, as shown below.

(8) Ιόλη: Αν κάποιος δάσκαλος στην τάξη μιλούσε Νέα Ελληνικά νομίζεις θα είχατε κάποιο όφελος;
If a teacher used Greek in the classroom, do you think you would benefit in any way?

Μαρίνος: Να μιλούμε πιο ευγενικά, να είμαστε πιο ευγενικοί, να μεν τσακκωνούμαστε τόσο.
It would make us sound more polite, be more polite, not sound as if we are arguing.

Politeness is an attribute frequently used to describe SMG (see also Tsiplakou 2003; Kyriakou 2015 and section 3 below). As Papazachariou et al. (2018) note, sometimes speakers convey their ideas about languages indirectly “through associating specific language elements with different social characteristics [...], communicative situations (formality, politeness) and/or social practices (religious, literary, or scientific activity)” (p. 127). This is what is illustrated in extracts (7) and (8) where SMG is seen as the appropriate language for specific science-related contexts and a variety that shapes communicative situations as polite and ones that respect social norms.

3 Parents’ attitudes towards CG

Parents’ negative attitudes towards CG were similar to the ones expressed by their children, albeit much more elaborate. For parents, SMG is pure, correct and systematic. These ideas are by no means unusual and unexpected. Folk perceptions of languages see standard varieties as the only pure forms of language which somehow pre-existed the other varieties with the latter only seen as deviant and wrong versions of the standard (Preston 2013). The following extracts are illustrative:

(9) Πατέρας Μαρίνας: Καταρχήν η Κυπριακή δεν είναι γλώσσα, είναι μια διάλεκτος που έσκει τη δική της ιστορία τζιαι ανάπτυξη τζιαι μεγαλώνοντας βλέπω ότι εν μια θαυμάσια γλώσσα της οποίας οι ρίζες της εν τζιαμαι τζιαι φαίνονται [...], αλλά εν μιλούμε για γλώσσα. Άρα θεωρώ το να εκφραστείς με την Ελληνική την καθαρόαιμη εν πολλά καλλύττερο.

To start with, Cypriot is not a language, it is a dialect with its own history and development and, as I get older, I realize that it is a brilliant language whose roots are there, you can see them [...], but it is not a language. So, I believe that expressing yourself in Greek, the pure language, is much better.

(10) Πατέρας Μαρίνας: Όταν ήταν μωρά μέχρι την ηλικία να παν στο δημοτικό μιλούσα τους Ελληνικά Ελληνικά [...] δηλαδή εν έλεαμε «τζιαι». Δηλαδή μιλώντας των μωρών έλεα τους και μιλούσα τους σωστά, όσο το δυνατό πιο σωστά. Ας μπει το μπόλι δηλαδή της σωστής γλώσσας τζιαι μετά [...] να μπου οι βάσεις [...]

When they were very young, just before going to primary school, I would speak to them in Greek [...]; that is we wouldn't use "and" [as pronounced in CG]. When I was talking to them I would speak correctly, as correctly as possible. The idea was to "plant the seed of" the correct language, to set the right foundations [...].

Apart from the idea of purity and correctness, the notion of richness of the standard and the poorness of the non-standard variety were also put forward. Elias' mother states:

(11) Ινναμπου σημαίνει Κυπριακά δηλαδή, μπορεί να σταθεί η κυπριακή γλώσσα που μόνη της; Έσκει τόσο πλούτο η ελληνική γλώσσα, πως μπορεί να σταθεί η κυπριακή γλώσσα που μόνη της;

What does Cypriot mean after all, can the Cypriot language stand on its own? There is so much richness in the Greek language, how can the Cypriot one stand on its own?

For her, CG is so poor that it cannot 'stand on its own' as a language in contrast to SMG which is a rich variety. Finally, the idea of appropriateness also emerged in the parents' interviews, but it was only linked to the notion of politeness.

(12) Μητέρα Νίκης: Νομίζω ακούεται πιο καλά [το να μιλάς Ελληνικά]. Επειδή μιλάς πιο ευγενικά με τα Ελληνικά όσο τζιαι να μεν το θέλεις να μιλήσεις ευγενικά πάντα ακούγεται πιο καλά στο αυτί νομίζω. Ενώ τα Κυπριακά με το «τζιαι» «ρε» τούτα κάπου εν ακούεται καλά τζιαι θεωρείς τον άλλον ας πούμε ότι εν πιο μορφωμένος ότι εν πιο ευγενικός [όταν μιλά Ελληνικά].

Speaking in Greek sounds better, in my opinion. Because you speak more politely even when you don't want to. While with Cypriot, with the "τζιαι" ['and'] and "re" [an address form] you don't sound as polite, and when you listen to someone using Greek you assume they are more educated and polite.'

Niki's mother feels that SMG makes the speaker sound more polite irrespective of their intentions, because it is an inherently more polite way of speaking. Conversely, the use of specific CG sounds—the postalveolar affricate /tʃ/ which does not exist in SMG— and lexis—here the address form "re" (dude, mate), which is paradoxically

also used in SMG—stigmatises someone as less educated and less polite. Another paradox is the fact that Niki’s mother expresses this view while also using *τζιαι* (‘and’) in her discourse (see extract above).

Similar findings have also been reported in the Greek Cypriot community in the UK in a study examining language attitudes of British-born Greek Cypriot pupils. In that context, phonological features and lexical items which do not necessarily belong to basilectal forms of CG (e.g., /tʃ/ in *τζιαι* (‘and’)) are labelled negatively by the speakers (Karatsareas 2020: 10). These are usually frequently used features of CG, as Karatsareas (2020) also notes, and it is possible that they are given as examples in such evaluations because they are seen as stereotypical features of CG. In fact, /tʃ/ is regarded as a trademark of CG (Tsiplakou 2009).

Moving on to the more positive attitudes parents hold towards CG, we see that for them CG is a marker of the(ir) past, a variety that people need to preserve. This is illustrated below:

- (13) Μητέρα Νίκης: Φυσικά εν τζιαι οι παραδόσεις μας [...] εν πολλά πράματα που αν χαθεί τζι η κυπριακή τζιαι τούτο εν λλίο.
Of course, there are also our traditions [...] there are a lot of things to consider and if Cypriot is lost this is also somewhat.

This idea is also evident in extract (9) where Marina’s father claims CG is a “brilliant language whose roots are there, you can see them” alluding to the importance of this language’s past (see also Fotiou (2009) for similar findings).

Finally, the theme of ease and intelligibility is brought up by some of the parents. For Marinos’ mother, using CG is easier than using SMG, because when using SMG, as she claims, one needs to think: “How am I going to say this, which syntactic structure would I use?” Two parents were also in favour of introducing CG into schools. Their reasoning for doing so was related to the idea of intelligibility (but each in a different way). Marina’s father believes that the oral use of CG can help students understand the lesson better. However, his suggestion also comes with a warning.

- (14) Πιστεύω η προφορική χρήση της κυπριακής γλώσσας στα δημοτικά να εννα βοηθήσει πολύ καλύτερα την κατανόηση του μηνύματος, είμαι απόλυτος σε τούτο. Που την άλλη, πρέπει να γίνει με πολλά προσεκτικό τρόπο, δηλαδή να μεν αλλοτριώσουμε τα πάντα.
I believe that the oral use of the Cypriot language in primary education would help in the better understanding of the gist of the lesson. I’m a firm believer of that. On the other hand, we should use caution; we shouldn’t destroy everything.

Traditionally schools are sites where the standard language and its link with Greek Cypriots’ Greek identity and history are promoted and endorsed. As the parent later explains, while intelligibility matters, one should not “destroy the Greek education we have in Cyprus for which we must all be very proud of” (see Fotiou and Ayiomamitou (forthcoming) for a more elaborate discussion on this). That is why, as he says in (14), one should be careful with the use of CG in education despite the fact that he clearly supports its oral use.

Marinos’ mother, on the other hand, sees the introduction of CG in schools in a positive light for another reason: in order to teach pupils what words in CG mean; i.e., for the teaching of CG. This suggestion may be linked to the notion discussed above

regarding the preservation of CG. Finally, it should be noted that for other parents the introduction of CG in schools is seen as something that will only bring about confusion (see Fotiou and Ayiomamitou, forthcoming).

4 Discussion and concluding remarks

The ideas of correctness, purity, appropriateness and the overt prestige attached to the standard language are all characteristics of what Milroy (2007) calls the ideology of the standard language. Standard languages are seen as the language par excellence while non-standard languages are seen as corrupt, illegitimate forms of the standard. Parents' prescriptive ideas regarding CG incorporate all aspects of this ideology while pupils' prescriptive ideas only incorporate the idea of correctness and appropriateness. This may be because at the age of 10 and 11 their attitudes about CG and SMG are not fully developed. In fact, adolescence is the period when attitudes towards standard varieties might become far more positive (Garrett, Coupland, and Williams 2003: 83). It has also been argued that “[c]hildren who speak a nonstandard variety initially display a preference or neutral attitude towards the variety they use; however, as they grow up, they tend to prefer dominant language ideologies, favoring standard varieties” (Cremona and Bates 1977, Day 1980, cited in Papazachariou et al. (2018)). However, what is important to highlight here is that even at the age of ten these children already display prescriptive ideas in favour of SMG (see also Pavlou 1999).

However, a careful look at their discourse shows that the pupils repeat notions and refer to contexts (such as their future trips to Greece) with which they do not necessarily relate to “in an experiential way” as (Karatsareas 2020: 9) also notes for the pupils' beliefs in his study. This gives one the impression that they are just repeating ideas they have heard from their parents and their teachers and not necessarily ideas they themselves hold because of their own experiences in life (ibid.). One other study that examined the language attitudes of children in Cyprus the same age as they ones here is Ioannidou (2004). Despite the fact that Ioannidou (2004) used a variety of tools in her study, spend considerably more time with her participants and reports findings from a group of 29 pupils, her findings are similar to ours in many respects: the pupils in her study valued positively SMG in matters of prestige, appropriateness, and correctness and valued positively CG regarding matters of solidarity, identity and ease of expression. All pupils in her sample marked CG as easier to use. However, a major difference with our findings is that the vast majority of them considered CG to be 'rude', 'inappropriate' and 'peasant' (Ioannidou 2004: 36–37). The pupils in our sample refrained from criticizing CG. This might be a result of the different tools Ioannidou (2004) used to elicit language attitudes, a result of the small sample in our study or an indication of a change of the attitudes held in Cyprus towards CG (see Section 1).

Regarding now the positive attitudes expressed in the interviews, the theme of ease and intelligibility is brought up by all four children (in agreement with data in Ioannidou (2004)). Clearly, pupils at this age would benefit from the purposeful use of their native language in the classroom and studies have shown that such bidialectal educational programmes benefit students' performance (e.g., Yiakoumetti, Evans, and Esch 2005). For some parents, using CG in primary schools is justified on the grounds that it will make it easier for the children to understand the lesson or because it will improve their knowledge of CG lexis. However, not all parents share this view since they believe that it will generate confusion. This is of course an opinion that can

potentially change if parents are shown how non-standard varieties can be used in education to enhance students' skills in the standard variety.

Finally, when it comes to the theme of social attractiveness and CG functioning as an in-group marker and a marker of identity, the pupils' ideas are more about their current identities while for their parents this idea is linked more with the past—CG as a symbol of one's culture, tradition and history which needs to be preserved for the future generations. This difference is interesting and one that needs to be further examined. Why do the adults feel the need to stress the importance of this variety's past when they do not stress enough its value in their lives today?

Due to space limitations, this paper only reported some preliminary findings from the examination of the pupils' and their parents' interviews. A more comprehensive analysis and discussion of the attitudes of both the pupils and their parents with the use of both the results from the interviews and the distribution of a large number of questionnaires is under way (Fotiou and Ayiomamitou, forthcoming).

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