

FROM VILLAGE TALK TO SLANG:

THE RE-ENREGISTERMENT OF A NON-STANDARDISED VARIETY IN AN URBAN DIASPORA

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Towards a sociolinguistics of diaspora

- “Language diversity is not just a large number of languages, but more crucially also the diversity within and amongst these languages” (Smakman & Heinrich, 2018: 5).
- Rojo and Márquez Reiter call for a focus on “the role of migration in transforming linguistic practices, ideologies, and identities in different national, economic, and sociopolitical contexts” (2015: 1).

Cypriot Greek: a hierarchised register continuum

- Cypriot Greek speakers construct the relationship between Cypriot Greek, the non-standardised variety of Cyprus, and Standard Greek in terms of the binary contrast **kypriáká ‘Cypriot’** versus **elliniká ‘Greek’** (or *kalamarístika* ‘pen-pusher speak’).
- Recent scholarship argues for a hierarchised continuum of registers (Katsoyannou et al., 2016; Tsiplakou et al., 2016):



- xorkáтика:** the register that incorporates the highest number of regional Cypriot features. Stigmatised as a linguistic practice, it is linked to notions of rurality and a general lack of sophistication and manners (Papapavlou & Sophocleous, 2006).

A new label for Cypriot Greek

- British-born speakers refer to Cypriot Greek as (Greek) slang. This is a novel label that is not known to apply to the variety in the original context of Cyprus (Karatsareas, 2018).

‘Cypriot is a slang of Greek’

Maria: at school they teach them Greek, proper Greek
 Interviewer: what do you mean by proper Greek?
 Maria: well OK Cypriot is a slang really of Greek if that makes sense so I would like [my daughter] to speak nicely

Talking about Greek in a complementary school classroom

- Complementary schools are “sites of identity construction through which the community identity is preserved, defended, renegotiated and reconstructed in light of discourses circulating within the wider society” (Simon, 2018: 4; cf. Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Lytra & Martin, 2010)
- Year 6 pupils have internalised the hierarchical ordering of Cypriot Greek and Standard Greek.

- They reproduce the *xorkáтика* label and the ideological schemata of rurality and correctness that have been transplanted from the original Cyprus context to the London diaspora.

- In order to elucidate the hierarchisation of the two Greek varieties, they call English into play and produce a four-part analogy between standard and non-standard forms in Greek and English:

tje [Cypriot Greek for ‘and’] is to **ce** [Standard Greek for ‘and’]
 what **wa[?]er** is to **water**

- The relevance of correctness and properness to the set-up of both the Cypriot Greek/Standard Greek and the slang/posh English binaries allows pupils to apply the label *slang* to Cypriot Greek forms and associate Standard Greek forms with poshness.

‘it just doesn’t sound right’

Melina: it [tje] sounds like *gangster village* like you know there are *slang words*.

Danai: also Greek *slang*

Natalia: it’s like *village*

Melina: it just doesn’t sound right

Danai: exactly so it [ce] is the proper way to say it

Teacher: what do you mean by saying it’s the proper way?

Natalia: like you know in English the way to talk properly it’s by saying I’m not talking *slang* it’s by talking properly

Melina: like you say innit

Natalia: by not dropping your ts so if you say like you know when people say *water* wa[?]er instead of *water* so that would be **tje** you say **ce**

Oracy versus literacy

- The teacher constructs Cypriot Greek as an unwritable language that can only be spoken as opposed to Standard Greek which can and must be written.

‘You can say it but you cannot write it’

Teacher: every time you have to write something don’t add the **-n** at the end ok? when we write there’s no need to add the **-n** but when we speak it’s very natural we can say it ok? when you speak Alexis dear add the **-n** ok?

- She routinely corrects Cypriot Greek features when students produce them in writing.
- Pupils draw connections between the teacher’s policy and practice and institutional discourses that they are exposed to in their mainstream schools: both construct non-standardised features as elements that corrupt written speech (Rampton, 2005, 2006; Harris 2006; Preece 2009, 2015).

