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Εφαρμοσμένη Γλωσσολογία
Journal of Applied Linguistics
Journal de Linguistique Appliquée

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Ετήσια έκδοση της Ελληνικής Εταιρίας Εφαρμοσμένης Γλωσσολογίας
Annual Publication of the Greek Applied Linguistics Association
Publication annuelle de l'Association Grecque de Linguistique Appliquée

Θεσσαλονίκη - 1991 - Thessaloniki

HELLAS: DIALECT AND SCHOOL*

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Abstract: Το άρθρο αυτό ασχολείται με την παρούσα γλωσσική κατάσταση στην Ελλάδα και, ιδιαίτερα, με προβλήματα που αυτή δημιουργεί στην εκπαίδευση. Για να εκτιμηθεί η διαλεκτική διαφοροποίηση, γίνεται μια σύντομη ανάδρομη στην ιστορία της Ελληνικής γλώσσας αρχίζοντας από την Ελληνιστική εποχή. Παρά τη μακρά διαχρονική της διαδρομή, η Ελληνική γλώσσα μπορεί να θεωρηθεί ως αρκετά ομοιογενής καθώς μάλιστα δεν αποτελεί μέρος της Ευρωπαϊκής διαλεκτικής συνέχειας. Τονίζεται ότι αν και έχουν επισταμένα μελετηθεί φωνολογικές ή φωνητικές και μορφολογικές πλευρές των Ελληνικών διαλέκτων, πολύ λίγη προσοχή έχει δοθεί στη διαλεκτική διαφοροποίηση από κοινωνιογλωσσολογική άποψη. Στο άρθρο εξετάζεται σε συντομία η παρούσα γλωσσική κατάσταση στο σχολείο και υπογραμμίζεται ότι μια αυστηρή αξιολόγηση θα ήταν ωφέλιμη και θα μπορούσε να συμβάλει σε κάποια μάλλον απαραίτητη αλλαγή διαθέσεων όσων εμπλέκονται στην εκπαίδευση.

As is well known, what characterises a language is its diversity rather than its homogeneity. The Greek language is no exception to this rule. However, the main characteristic of the Greek speech community up till very recently had been its diglossic situation. Ferguson (1959) was the first to introduce the term 'diglossia' which he defined as follows:

DIGLOSSIA is a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation.

(244-45)

* An abridged version of this paper appeared in *Language International* 2.1 (1990).

The roots of diglossia in Greece go back to the Alexandrian period when Hellenistic scholars were at great pains to restore the language of the Classical Age. Their approach to language has been called atticism and was motivated by their belief that the colloquial speech of their own time was 'corrupt'. This attitude persisted right through the Byzantine era to take shape in the evolution of 'katharevousa' late in 19th century, the variety based on Classical Greek, and regarded as the official language of the newly founded state.

The 20th century is called the period of demoticism (Triandafyllidis, 1938) because it is characterised by new linguistic ideals incarnated in the form of 'demotiki', the language variety based on the spoken language of the Greek people. However, katharevousa was the language formally taught at school until very recently (1976) when demotiki was declared the official language of the State and, consequently, previous to that date, schoolchildren were not exposed to any kind of formal instruction regarding their native language.

Understandably, since the main concern of scholars in Greece had been focused on the introduction of demotiki as the official language of the State and Education,¹ there has been very little research concerning dialect variation in relation to education. Subsequent to the introduction of demotiki as the official language of the State and Education, there has been a rather protracted debate amongst linguists and scholars concerning the determination of what exactly constitutes Modern Greek [KNE: Koine Neo-Elliniki, or Modern Greek Common Language as the prevailing variety of demotiki is now called (Setatos, 1974, 1976, 1988; Babiniotis, 1979; Haralambopoulos, 1985)].

¹ On the connection between State and Education in Greece see Filias (1988). Also the whole issue of *Contemporary Education*, 40 is devoted to this question.

Let it be mentioned that a rather mixed variety of Greek, *mikti*, was widely used before 1976 as a compromised intermediate variety between katharevousa and demotiki and helped to resolve communicative tensions which typically arise in diglossic situations (Ferguson, 1959). In this mixed variety lexical items as well as morphological forms were borrowed from katharevousa and their traces are still evident in Modern Greek speech, although *mikti* was mainly used as the written language.

The linguistic situation, therefore, in Greece is quite complex. The considerable amount of academic energy expended on the issue of the standardisation and codification of Modern Greek Koine deflected the researcher's interests from a synchronic description of Modern Greek in recent years (Babiniotis, undated). On the other hand, dialectology was developed quite early in Greece, the major thrust toward studying dialects more systematically given by G. Hatzidakis.

It is well known that the Greek language does not form any part of the European dialect continuum, as this is described in Chambers and Trudgill (1980); in this light it might be claimed that when we speak of the Greek language, we use 'language' as a technical, linguistically rather than just politically defined term (Chambers and Trudgill, 1980; Hudson, 1980). Apart from a very small percentage of the population, 7.5% according to Mirabel (1959), or 5% according to Triandafyllidis (1938), who speak varieties which are not considered to belong to the Greek language (Turkish, Slavic, Albanian,¹ etc.), it could be said that Greeks speak a more or less homogeneous language if one regards mutual intelligibility as the main criterion for differentiating dialects of a *common* language (Chambers and Trudgill, 1980; Hudson, 1980;

¹ The variety of Albanian spoken in Greece is called Arvanitika. In this respect see Trudgill (1983), Tsitsipis (1981, 1983, 1984, 1988). On multilingualism and scholarisation in Greece see Kitis (forthcoming).

Sankoff, 1969). However, if the criterion of mutual intelligibility as the decisive factor, not only for the delimitation of languages, but also for distinguishing varieties of a *common* language is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition, we can safely conclude that we cannot operate on the assumption that the Greek language is homogeneous, i.e. on what has been called the fiction of homogeneity (Lyons, 1981), either in our linguistic research or in matters of educational policy.

However, it is worth keeping in mind when talking of dialects that 'dialects and accents frequently merge into one another without any discrete break' (Chambers and Trudgill, 1980: 5) and this is particularly true of the linguistic varieties in Greece. Solomos, the poet, writes back in 1824, in connection with the question of dialectal variation that existed in his time:

How many dialects are there? How many? Make sure that you are not misled by the different accents in delimiting the dialects of Greece. What does it matter if we have ten words different from the words in Moreas. So what are these great differences? We say *pateró* and elsewhere they say *pàtero*, we say *matía* and elsewhere they say *matìà*, we say *aéras* and elsewhere they say *ajéras* ...

and he goes on to add:

I had alien servants from various regions, one from Mani, and I could understand him perfectly well; one from Gastouni, one from Olympus, one from the island of Chios, one from Filippoupolis and I could understand them all perfectly well.

Dialogue

Dialectal variation, therefore, did not even in the past century engender unintelligibility, mostly because the main differentiating features were phonological¹ rather than grammatical or lexical. That is not, however, to be interpreted as implying that there were very few morphological and lexical dialectal features. On the contrary, there has always been

¹ Dialects in Greece have been studied mostly from the phonological point of view.

considerable morphological variation in the Greek language, a heavily inflected language, which is due on the one hand to the vastness of the geographical region of the state during the Byzantine era, and, consequently, to the evolution of various dialects, and on the other to the diglossic situation that prevailed up till recently.

A rough classification of the 'core' dialects in Greece, based mainly on phonological phenomena, will give us the following five basic groups (Newton, 1972):

- (1) Peloponnesian - Ionian, which primarily has contributed to the evolution of Modern Greek Koine
- (2) Northern Greek
- (3) Old Athenian, which is not, however, a dialect spoken in Athens nowadays
- (4) Cretan, spoken mainly on the island of Crete and on some other islands
- (5) South-eastern dialects, mainly spoken on the islands of Chios, Dodecanese, and Cyprus.¹

It is interesting to note, however, that most scholars, and Greeks generally, distinguish primarily between 'northern' and 'southern' dialects, the former being characterised by speakers as rather 'harsh', the latter as more 'refined'.

Quite clearly, what has been said up to his point concerns geographical dialects, and very little has been said regarding their relative status. The following questions might therefore be raised:

- (1) Are dialects considered to be forms of language spoken in more or less isolated parts of the country, (remote rural forms of language)?
- or (2) Are they considered to be some kind of deviation from the standard language (the norm) and therefore as aberrations of the standard variety?
- or (3) Are dialects just varieties of language entertaining an equal

¹ Relevant literature regarding these dialects can be found in Newton (1972), Kontosopoulos (1981).

status as that of the standard variety?

Obviously, although (3) would be a desirable situation, it amounts to little else than wishful thinking. If (1) is the case, i.e. if the issue is about what traditionally have been called regional dialects, then the appreciation of dialect depends on the social status of the class of people who speak it. It has always been true in Greece that people who live in rural areas are considered more backward and less sophisticated than people living in cities.

However, a number of factors have played a part in minimising regional dialectal variation: With the advent of mass media communication younger people have had considerable exposure to the standard language rather than the dialect spoken by their elders. Secondly, there has been remarkable geographical mobility in recent years. Peasantry aspiring to a better standard of living fled rural areas and flocked in and around big cities — and especially the hydrocephalic capital — where the standard language is spoken (Tsoucalas, 1975). Thirdly, the majority of younger people leave their home places, anyway, to pursue higher education in big cities.¹ Due to all these factors one might confidently conclude that younger dialect speakers living in urban areas who use the idiomatic form (lexis) almost always know the equivalent form in the standard variety, anyway. It is the accent, however, over which dialect speakers have very little control, that persists in their speech of the standard variety.

Dialects in Greece have always been examined from the point of view posed by question (1). However, due to the above mentioned factors, in our view the researcher's perspective on dialect variation should radi-

¹ From those schoolchildren of rural provenance who manage to complete secondary education 70% aspire to pursue higher education at University, College or Polytechnic level. Let it be noted that 19% of the University student population is of rural provenance (Fragoudaki, 1985).

cally alter if linguistic divergence is to be fruitfully examined. Therefore, question (1) cannot be profitably posited any longer; instead one should seriously examine question (2) rather than (3) which presupposes a classless society.

If 'social classes are not organised or sharply demarcated social groups, but are rather aggregates of people with similar economic characteristics' (Trudgill, 1974: 32) in England, they are even less so in Greece. Nevertheless, the Greek society is a typically rapidly changing class society (Worsley, 1972) whose stratificational structure has not been adequately investigated yet. Leondidou (1986) notes that the absence of research on non-rural social classes in Greece is amazing. (But see Poulantzas, 1968; Filias, 1974; Leondidou, 1981; Petmezidou-Tsoulouvi, 1984, 1986). Neither has there been any significant work carried out as concerns the correlation of linguistic and sociological phenomena which must be, admittedly, very complex. (But see Pantelis, 1973; Makri-Tsilipakou, 1981, 1984, 1986; Papakonstantinou, 1981; Baslis, 1981, 1983, 1988).

Due to significant differences between life in urban areas and life in rural areas, which still persist, it is wise to identify at least three major social groups in Greek class society: the 'middle class', the 'working class' and the peasantry of the rural areas. However, it must be emphasised that, especially in post-war Greece, the class boundaries and barriers on the 'class continuum' — and correspondingly on the 'linguistic continuum' (Trudgill, 1974) — must be remarkably flexible and fluid as boundaries such as the educational level, occupation, values, behaviour patterns and such variables, which have always acted as social barriers, have to a considerable extent given way to income correlates as social status evaluation determinants. In other words, the socio-economic situation in Greece is so fluid that the well-attested statement that

given a person's occupation, we can estimate fairly well the probability of the kind of income, educational level, housing, politics, etc., he will have, for these things tend to hang together (Worsley, 1972: 292)

is not necessarily valid any longer.

It must be added, therefore, that in Modern Greek society size of income and visible items of consumption tend to be indices of social evaluation irrespective of most other variables which together with wealth have traditionally always determined social class status.¹ Moreover, due to this social mobility and to mobility caused by migration from the countryside into the towns and cities, it is even more difficult to identify these three social classes for linguistic purposes. Besides, the interrelationship between the peasantry and the working class has not been investigated. It is not unreasonable to assume that, by and large, these two classes merge into one another, especially in urban areas, in a confusingly large measure. This is only expected since it is true of other societies, too. Understandably, this situation creates grave difficulties in our attempt to identify linguistic varieties. For example, Trudgill (1983: 186) writes that

In Great Britain and Northern Ireland, as in many other countries, the relationship between social and regional language varieties is such that the greatest degree of regional differentiation is found among lower working-class speakers and the smallest degree at the other end of the social scale, among speakers from the upper middle-class,

while Halliday (1978: 158) notes that whereas

a dialect, in principle, is simply the sum of any set of variants that always go together, or at least that typically go together, in city speech such configurations are by no means fixed.

What is the linguistic situation, therefore, in more concrete terms in contemporary Greek society, and what are the educational policies

¹ On criteria used for class assessment, see Cole (1955). On the connection between social status and class status, see Weber (1947).

practised? Generally speaking, one might say that there are few linguistic differences in the speech of educated people, and these differences lie mainly in that the standard is spoken with a regional accent, which persists in their speech. However, it is wrong to assume that there is in Greece a high status standard accent, like the British English R.P. which is employed mainly by Public School graduates.

Dialectal features, either grammatical or lexical and, most notably, phonological or phonetic, which obviously divert from standard usage, are considered substandard forms or rustic forms of the language, associated with the peasantry, but not necessarily with the working class as such (Makri-Tsilipakou, 1986). However, as has already been noted, the connection between the peasantry and the working class in Greece has not yet been investigated. What can be said, though, is that the peasantry lack in prestige, are considered backward and less cultured, and this evaluation is quite clearly reflected in the evaluation of regional speech.

Most teachers in Greece have not become sensitised to an appreciation of dialectal variation, since dialectology does not form any part of the syllabus at University level. On the other hand, although the State never banned the use of linguistic varieties from Education by any kind of statutory legislation (Kontosopoulos, 1981), standard Greek, i.e. Modern Greek Common Language, is the language of Education. Besides, there is no variety of language textbooks to cater for the various needs of schoolchildren since textbooks are uniform for all schools in all regions of the country as prescribed by the Ministry of Education (National Curriculum).

It goes without saying, therefore, that there is a contrast between young standard language speakers and dialect speakers which is more pronounced in rural areas and in underprivileged areas of big cities. This

situation generates educational problems which, however, cannot always be guaranteed a sympathetic understanding on the part of teachers.

According to Baslis (1988), who conducted research in the Basil Bernstein tradition, teachers grade more highly essays by middle class students, who understandably are standard language speakers, than those by working class and regional areas schoolchildren. It is concluded that teachers' evaluation of students' work is affected by the middle class schoolchildren's employment of the variables analysed in Bernstein's investigation. Moreover, their expectations regarding their students' academic potential and prospective careers were shown to be determined to a great extent by their knowledge of the children's social background (Also Trudgill, 1983).

However, due to scant research into the educational problems of dialect speakers, one can only make conjectures in this respect. Obviously, young dialect speakers are at a disadvantage since linguistic norms are tailored for middle-class children and especially for standard language speakers. Fragoudaki (1985, 1987) notes that children from lower classes find themselves in an alien linguistic environment when they are first introduced to school, where they are forced to 'translate' language used by the teacher and textbook into their own linguistic system whose structure may very well be different. This fact, quite obviously, impedes direct communication thus placing young dialect speakers at a clear disadvantage compared to their peers whose linguistic systems are not diverse from that of the teacher and book (Tocatlidou, 1986).

Language textbooks, which are supposed to underpin and promote mastery of the language in all its manifestations, are primarily based on written forms of the standard language. Furthermore, they have a rather prescriptive character (Tocatlidou, 1986; Fragoudaki, 1987;

Haralambopoulos, 1988). Instead, language teaching should initially capitalise on the linguistic knowledge the schoolchildren have already acquired in their home environment (Mitsis, 1984).

At this point, it must be acknowledged that the new language textbooks which have been recently introduced both in Primary and Secondary Education constitute a very positive move towards the right approach to language teaching, although a great deal of work still needs to be done in this respect (Fragoudaki, 1987; but see Tocatlidou, 1986, for a sound critique). Moreover, the emphasis in class lies in developing a command of written forms of the standard language to the detriment of the development of oral language production, which in any event will be a simulation of the written language (Haralambopoulos, 1988).

Although there has been no research in this area that I am aware of, it is reasonable to assume that participation of dialect speakers in verbal interaction in the classroom must be rather low, especially in classes consisting of children from different social backgrounds. Even if they have control over grammatical and lexical dialectal features, which can therefore be suppressed in their oral language production tasks, dialect speakers can hardly monitor and suppress phonological and phonetic features.

It need not be mentioned that children are conscious of the fact that their accented speech is stigmatised and they even 'admit' that standard speech is aesthetically more pleasing and refined (Tsolakopoulou, 1988). Moreover, depending on teachers' attitudes, dialect speakers run the risk of being penalised every time they attempt participation in class interaction by being 'corrected' in an unpatterned and intuitive way (Labov, 1964; Dittmar, 1976). Dialectal features may even elicit ridicule on the part of their peers (Fragoudaki, 1987; Tsolakopoulou, 1988). These factors make dialect speaking schoolchildren reluctant to express

themselves in class. In conclusion, it seems that the general behaviour of teachers seems to favour standard language speakers since evaluation is based on a scale of values of middle-class speech (Baslis, 1988).

Moreover, dialect speakers' parents, mostly peasants eager to see their children espouse the urban way of life and ascend the social scale, recognise that ability in standard Greek will enable their children to achieve higher social and professional status. All these factors might, not only hamper school achievement (Tzani, 1983), but may very well lead dialect speakers 'to disparage their own language, and children in particular to develop feelings of linguistic insecurity and even of what has been called *linguistic self-hatred*' (Trudgill, 1983: 209).

It will not suffice to alter teachers' attitudes toward linguistic variation to the extent that they become merely tolerant of all varieties of language. Favourable attitude towards dialect is expected of teachers who happen to be themselves autochthones, and speakers of the dialect. Their behaviour in the classroom, however, need not be tempered by this fact as there has been shown to be a discrepancy between teachers' attitude and their behaviour in the classroom (Hagen, 1987).

Teachers must be positively disposed to linguistic diversity and persuaded that all varieties of Greek are equally 'correct' (Tsolakopoulou, 1988). Adoption of both the right attitude and behaviour can only be achieved by familiarising prospective teachers with linguistic varieties, initially through the school curriculum, and at a later stage of their education through the syllabus at University level (Kamaroudis, 1988; Tsolakopoulou, 1988). Their syllabus at College must include an Introduction to Linguistics, Sociolinguistics and the Sociology of Language (Fragoudaki, 1987). It is worthy of note that the Kingman Report states that all teachers of English 'need some explicit knowledge of the forms and the uses of the English language'. Teachers must be

made aware of the legitimacy of all the conventions of language behaviour which are particular to the various social groups to which children normally belong. These conventions may relate to different dialects or different accents and even to different languages and the child needs to acquire them all in order to operate effectively and not only in school language, which is the language of his/her public world, but also in home and street language (Kingman Report).

Admittedly, of late there has been an increase in the appreciation of linguistic variation and a growing awareness in educational circles that conventional attitudes must change. Apart from the introduction of considerably improved language textbooks, a collection of texts from various dialects which will accompany textbooks in Secondary Education is in press at the moment.

Moreover, a working team was set up at the Teachers-in-Service Training Centre, consisting of I. Tsolakopoulou, S. Hatzisavvidi, E. Hondolidou and A. Iordannidou, on the initiative of A. Haralambopoulos, Professor of Linguistics, affiliated to the Centre. The team have drafted certain proposals regarding the teaching of Greek, which, they think, should not only focus on all uses of language but should also familiarise schoolchildren with dialectal variation as a source of richness so that they develop an appreciation of their linguistic environment.

However, it is imperative that in this country, too, a Committee of Inquiry into the Teaching of the Greek language be officially appointed by the Secretary to Education, which would investigate the matter thoroughly and make recommendations which the State should undertake to implement.

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(Gr): indicates that the language is Greek.

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