
RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Language Attitudes and Reported Practices of Parents of Preschool Children in Cyprus

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the language attitudes and reported language practices of parents of children at the kindergarten level in the Greek-Cypriot community of Cyprus. The two varieties spoken in this community are in a diglossic relationship: the high variety, Standard Modern Greek (henceforth SMG), which is also the official language of Cyprus, and the low variety, the Greek-Cypriot dialect (henceforth GC), which is the non-standardised native variety. Examining the parental attitudes and reported practices of diglossic speakers in the home is crucial for the vitality of both varieties as well as for the speakers' confidence and sense of identity. Data were collected using questionnaires and interviews. The results from the questionnaires, which are discussed in this paper, show that although most parents consider both SMG and GC to be part of their national and cultural heritage and linguistic identity and express positive attitudes towards both varieties, they encourage their children to use the standard variety from a preschool age. This could be due to the fact that the official language of education in Cyprus is SMG, parents, as diglossic speakers, wish for their children to express themselves fluently in writing in the high variety (SMG), and generally to succeed at school. These language attitudes and reported practices reveal how strong the ideology of the standard language (Milroy, 2007) is in diglossic settings such as Cyprus.

KEYWORDS

Language Attitudes; Language Practices; Dialect; Diglossia; Language Ideology

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1. Introduction

Exploring people's language attitudes allows the researcher to discover and understand the beliefs, opinions, stereotypes and ideologies of a community towards the languages in use. In general, having an attitude towards something or someone entails having feelings of like or dislike, approval or disapproval and so forth, which are normally reflected in what people say, react to, or do (Eiser, 1986, p. 11). Language attitudes can include a variety of attitudes such as attitudes towards languages, dialects, speech styles, language groups, minority and majority languages, learning a new language, language variation, bilingualism, language maintenance and shift, code switching and mixing (Baker, 1992; Santello, 2015). When looking at the relationship between language attitudes and practices, Bradley (2002) reflects on why some minority groups assimilate to the host culture and lose their language, while some other groups maintain their linguistic and cultural identity; in fact, he questions whether it is the attitudes of that speech community that crucially determine language maintenance. For Fishman (1964), attitudes towards languages can play a significant role in multilingual societies; attitudes may affect language planning and policy as well as the maintenance or loss of languages in a community. Namely, the speakers' positive attitudes towards a linguistic variety may promote its use and consequently, favour the vitality and maintenance of that variety, while negative attitudes towards a variety may result in decreasing its use and consequently bring language shift or loss.

While language attitudes are often considered crucial to the understanding of language behaviour, the influence of attitudes on linguistic behaviour or usage is not always very clear, particularly in multilingual settings. For example, in Wales, most parents

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report that their native language should be preserved and that they would like to teach this language to their children while in fact, very few parents use it frequently with their children (Lyon and Elis, 2010). Similarly, while Irish people express positive attitudes towards their native language, they scarcely use it at home with their children (Brudner and White, 1979). Choi (2003) also found inconsistency between linguistic attitudes and linguistic use in Paraguay where the positive attitudes of the speakers (students and parents) towards Guarani, one of the two official languages, did not reflect their linguistic behaviour as Spanish is the language they mostly use.

Children acquire language in a natural environment —the home— and become proficient speakers or native speakers of a language before they start primary school (Foster-Cohen, 1999). Therefore, it can be expected that the linguistic practices of the home reflect to a great extent the attitudes of the parents, their ideologies and feelings towards that language. As Baker (1992) also notes, it is likely that the parents' language attitudes significantly affect their children's language attitudes; specifically, the language of the home has an impact on attitudes as children's attitudes tend to be similar to their parents, although other factors may also affect the children's attitudes (such as school, their friends and neighbours). In fact, research suggests that children form linguistic attitudes before they even start primary school (Garrett et al., 2003) which implies that these attitudes are primarily created in the home environment and during the preschool years in kindergarten. For this reason, investigating parental attitudes is vital as this may provide insights for the future course of a linguistic variety. In addition, as Fishman (1991) claims, the language practice in the home contributes to predicting whether a language will be maintained across generations.

The present study focuses on the reported language attitudes and practices of Greek-Cypriot parents whose children attend private kindergartens in Cyprus (ages 0-6). This research is different from other studies on the sociolinguistic situation of Cyprus as parental attitudes of preschool children is an understudied matter. To the best of my knowledge, there is no other study in Cyprus examining parental attitudes of kindergarten-age children. The aim of this research is to find out the attitudes of Greek-Cypriot parents of preschool children towards Standard Modern Greek and the Greek-Cypriot dialect; which variety they use with their children and which variety they encourage their toddlers to use and why; and, investigate whether these attitudes reflect the parents' reported linguistic practices. In other words, I will examine whether there is consistency between the parents' attitudes towards the two varieties and their linguistic practices with the children, and compare these findings with other studies on parental attitudes in Cyprus (even though the children's age group of this research is different). Exploring parents' language attitudes and practices is vital as these possibly affect their children's attitudes and practices while growing up. This study may provide a better understanding of the Cypriot diglossia (how the two varieties function in the Cypriot diglossic society), and insights about the role each variety plays in people's lives as well as the vitality of each variety as it can affect language maintenance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Greek-Cypriot community of Cyprus

This article investigates language attitudes and reported practices in the Greek-Cypriot community of Cyprus. Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean (Richter, 2010) and it is (politically and geographically) divided into two distinct communities, the Turkish-Cypriot and Greek-Cypriot, as a result of the 1974 war. Both Turkish and Greek are the official languages of Cyprus; nevertheless, Turkish has no communicative purpose within the Greek-Cypriot community (Karyolemou, 2001) and is spoken natively only by the Turkish-Cypriots living in Northern Cyprus. As the official languages of Cyprus, both Greek and Turkish are used in formal government documents such as passports, government-issued identification cards, currency bills, and government-issued forms (Hadjioannou, Tsiplakou, and Kappler, 2011). The term 'Greek-Cypriot' is used in this study to refer to all Cypriots living in the Greek-speaking community of Cyprus because the term 'Cypriot' may also include 'Turkish-Cypriots', the citizens of the Turkish-Cypriot community of Cyprus.

Two forms of the same language are spoken in the Greek-Cypriot community of Cyprus: Standard Modern Greek, the official language of Cyprus, and Greek-Cypriot, the non-standard native variety of Greek-Cypriots. The two varieties are in a diglossic relationship in Ferguson's (1959) terms; this means that two linguistic varieties coexist in society, each one having different functions (Rowe and Grohmann, 2013). In the Cypriot diglossic context, SMG is the high variety, used in formal aspects of communication such in education, while GC is the low variety, used in informal aspects of communication such as at home and with friends. Even though the two varieties are related, they are not mutually intelligible; namely, in a conversation between Greeks and Greek-Cypriots, if the Greek speakers have not been in touch with GC, it will be difficult for them to fully understand their Greek-Cypriot interlocutors (Arvaniti, 2006).

Examining the language attitudes of Greek-Cypriots will possibly reveal the parents' language ideologies. Language ideologies mediate between social forms and forms of talk, and they are not only about language, but also link language to identity, morality and so forth (Woolard, 1998). Ideologies can be expressed in explicit talk about language, that is, in metalinguistic discourse; people may explicitly express their views or ideologies about language through language use (Woolard, 1998). In Cyprus, the prevailing language ideology is that GC is a dialect of SMG. This ideology is mainly transmitted by the educational system of

Cyprus, in addition to the ideology of ethnic nationalism, according to which Greek-Cypriots are ethnically Greek (Arvaniti, 2006). Since Cypriot Independence in 1960, SMG is the only language of state education in Cyprus and its use is considered as connecting Greek-Cypriots to their motherland, Greece and the Greek ethnic identity, whereas GC has not been included in education either as a medium of communication or as a school topic for study (Ioannidou, 2009a). In other words, education in Cyprus promotes the use of SMG and the Greek ethnic identity. Even though language policy in Cyprus advises teachers to use SMG during the lessons, this is not always the case as SMG is not the students' mother tongue and GC features are present in the students' speech, as shown in studies such as Ioannidou's (2009b) and Sophocleous' (2011).

Although SMG is the official language of state education in Cyprus, a number of studies have investigated the potential effects and benefits of the introduction of a bidialectal programme in Cyprus (Yiakoumetti, 2006, 2007; Tsiplakou, 2007; Papapavlou and Pavlou, 2007; Papapavlou, 2010; Ayiomamitou, 2018). In particular, Yiakoumetti (2007) studied the potentialities of bidialectal education, the use of both SMG and GC, in primary schools in Cyprus. The results of this study propose that the inclusion of GC in the classroom and the explicit instruction of the differences between SMG and GC help students separate the two varieties more effectively and, consequently, reduce the presence of dialectal features in the written performance of the standard (Yiakoumetti, 2007). Also, Papapavlou (2010) points out that the introduction of bidialectal education in Cyprus where both SMG and GC are taught can elevate the status of GC, enhance the students' linguistic abilities and enrich the students' self-esteem and confidence.

2.2 Language attitudes in Cyprus

Existing research on language attitudes in Cyprus mainly involves the investigation of the attitudes of Greek-Cypriots towards SMG and GC, attitudes towards certain GC phonological sounds (Papapavlou, 2001), attitudes towards the four broad register levels of GC (Papapavlou and Sophocleous, 2009) and attitudes towards the use of these two varieties in written Internet communication (Themistocleous, 2007). Research in Cyprus examines the attitudes of preschool children (Pavlou, 1999; Satraki, 2015), the attitudes of Greek-Cypriot teenagers (Papapavlou, 2001; Kyriakou, 2016), the attitudes of teenagers and adults (high school, lyceum and university students by Tsiplakou, 2004), and teachers and children's attitudes in kindergarten (Sophocleous and Wilks 2010). It can be seen that parental attitudes have not been the focus of many studies (see Fotiou and Ayiomamitou, 2021 for the parents' language attitudes of primary school children).

An overview of the literature on language attitudes in Cyprus suggests that Greek-Cypriots have positive attitudes towards SMG and a variety of attitudes towards GC, both positive and negative. When looking at children's attitudes in Cyprus, studies confirm the fact that children are able to distinguish between language varieties and actually form attitudes towards language varieties very early, as from the age of five (Rosenthal, 1974). This is shown in the studies of Pavlou (1999) and Satraki (2015), who used Rosenthal's (1974) methodology of the matched guise technique of magic boxes. Pavlou (1999) investigated the language attitudes of children attending kindergarten; the children, who had already formed ideas about language, expressed preference for the SMG forms. Similarly, Satraki (2015) examined the attitudes of children aged 5-7 years old. The results of this study showed that especially older children seem to favour standard-like forms and disfavour dialect-like forms; the female participants also seemed to be more in favour of standardised forms than boys. The findings of these studies are significant as they suggest that the creation of negative stereotypes towards GC, which children adopt early on, may begin in the home environment.

Sophocleous and Wilks (2010) examined teachers' and children's attitudes in state kindergartens in Cyprus towards the use of SMG and GC in the classroom and whether children's attitudes towards the standard and non-standard varieties start to develop at an early age. In line with Pavlou (1999) and Satraki (2015), Sophocleous and Wilks (2010) state that kindergarten-age children can distinguish between the two varieties and also understand which occasions in the classroom call for the use of one variety or the other. This reflects the linguistic practices of the classroom; specifically, teachers use SMG when salience is placed on language such as the teaching of new vocabulary or when significance is placed on children's use of 'correct' language. They reported being relatively flexible towards the use of GC in the classroom such as in less formal interactions related to children's personal experiences and creative activities, as they believe it helps to boost the children's confidence (Sophocleous and Wilks, 2010). When looking at these results, it can be seen that in a diglossic setting such as Cyprus children learn from a very young age how the two varieties are functionally distributed, connecting for instance SMG with formality and GC with informality, and simultaneously form attitudes towards the two varieties.

Research in Cyprus also investigates the attitudes of teenagers and adults. Earlier studies on adults' language attitudes reveal that Greek-Cypriots have more favourable attitudes towards SMG than towards their native variety, GC. This is shown in Papapavlou's (1998) study who examined the attitudes of university students by the use of the matched guise technique, and found out that students considered the speakers of SMG as more educated, interesting, and intelligent, while the GC speakers were deemed as more sincere and humorous. Similarly, in another study involving university students, Papapavlou (2001) examined whether the use of certain sounds such as /j/ and /dʒ/, that are not part of the phonological inventory of SMG, marks the speech as rural; whether the speech is less intelligible; and whether the speaker is perceived as less educated. This study revealed that the presence

of the sound /ʃ/ in conversation marked the speech as more Cypriot-accented than the presence of the sound /dʒ/ (Papapavlou, 2001). Although the results showed that the educational background of a speaker could not be judged precisely by the use of these sounds, the frequent presence of /ʃ/ in speech was associated with primary level education rather than secondary. This may suggest that if these sounds existed in SMG, Greek-Cypriot speakers would not perceive them as rural-sounding.

More recent studies suggest that Greek-Cypriots hold negative attitudes towards basilectal features of GC, but not towards mesolectal features. Papapavlou and Sophocleous (2009) investigated (by the use of interviews) the attitudes of Greek-Cypriot university students towards speakers of four broad register levels of GC and how they construct their social identity through language use. The results of this study showed that the speakers of basilectal features (the variety most distant from the standard form) of GC were negatively perceived by other speakers (Papapavlou and Sophocleous, 2009). Regarding the statements made by the students, basilectal features of GC seemed to be associated with village life and people being less educated, while the use of SMG seemed to be associated with status and prestige (Papapavlou and Sophocleous, 2009). Most students stated that they generally use mesolectal features (the variety between the acrolect, the variety closest to the standard, and the basilect) in their speech, a mixed version of SMG and GC, while nobody reported using exclusively SMG in interactions with Greek-Cypriots (Papapavlou and Sophocleous, 2009). This may suggest that overt prestige is attached to SMG and to the GC registers close to SMG. In addition, these university students may have high expectations of upward mobility, of advancing socially and professionally in society, and therefore, they may be prone to the use of linguistic forms closer to the standard. In other words, it is possible that they diverge their speech from basilectal forms of GC.

When looking at the research on language attitudes in Cyprus, there seems to be a tendency for more positive attitudes towards GC than in the past. In Tsiplakou's (2004) research on the language attitudes of high school, lyceum and university students towards GC and SMG (by the use of questionnaires and interviews), the respondents expressed positive attitudes towards both varieties. Specifically, the participants did not consider SMG superior to GC in terms of richness, prestige, honesty. A similar attitude prevails in relation to language use and Internet communication. Themistocleous (2007) examined the attitudes of Greek-Cypriot Internet users towards GC in online communication through an online questionnaire. The results of her study revealed that the Greek-Cypriot respondents (between 24 and 35 years old) had positive attitudes towards the use of GC in computer-mediated communication (Themistocleous, 2007). Themistocleous (2007) suggests that the positive attitudes which resulted from her study, may be connected to the fact that the use of GC in the media is currently increasing (also suggested by Tsiplakou, 2004). Themistocleous (2007, p. 485) also argues that the use of GC in online written communication 'is becoming more and more emblematic in the sense that it becomes a medium of expression of the Greek-Cypriot youth identity'. In other words, by using the GC variety in online written communication, young Greek-Cypriots promote not only their mother tongue but also their Cypriot identity (Themistocleous, 2007).

With reference to parental attitudes towards SMG and GC in Cyprus, the only study found is by Fotiou and Ayiomamitou (2021), who examined the language attitudes of elementary school children and their parents. In this study, parents assigned features of superiority, status and competence to the speakers of the standard variety, while characteristics of friendliness, likeability, social attractiveness, and personal integrity were assigned to the speakers of both varieties. The parents' views regarding the introduction of GC in education were unclear; they consider that the use of the dialect is only accepted in oral communication. In contrast, the pupils expressed positive attitudes towards both varieties; they seemed to value the dialect and admitted that they would like to use it at school because it is easier for them and because they view it as part of their identity (Fotiou and Ayiomamitou, 2021).

3. Methodology

The study took place in Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus. The participants of the study are parents whose children attend private Greek-speaking kindergartens in Nicosia. The questionnaire was completed by 50 parents, both men and women, aged between 32 and 48 years old. They practise various professions such as a psychologist, beautician, secretary, engineer, journalist, brand manager. They all live in Nicosia and most of them were born there. A smaller number of parents were born in Larnaca, Limassol, the US, Ukraine and Greece. Ethics and trustworthiness were taken into account during the research. Consent for participation in this research study was obtained from the kindergarten directors and the parents who participated through acquaintances. The link of the online questionnaire (on Google Forms) was sent to the parents and the questionnaire was completed anonymously.

A pilot questionnaire and in-depth interviews were used to find out the attitudes of kindergarten-age children. This article discusses the results obtained from the questionnaire; the results from the in-depth interviews, which were conducted after the questionnaires, will be discussed in another paper. The purpose of the interview was to examine in depth the parents' attitudes and linguistic practices and triangulate the questionnaire results. The questionnaire used in this study is a direct tool as the direct approach relies on the overt elicitation of attitudes since the participants are called to express explicitly what their attitudes are to different language phenomena (Garrett, 2010). At the beginning of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to provide demographic information such as sex, age, occupation and place of birth.

The questionnaire is divided into three parts and gathers both qualitative and quantitative data. In the first part of the questionnaire, there are four open-ended questions asking the participants to state which variety they generally use, when they use GC and when they use SMG, and which variety they encourage their children to use. The second part of the questionnaire contains a table where the parents had to state which variety they use in specific situations of communication with their children such as when playing, or reading a book, during a meal and so forth. The last part of the questionnaire consists of four sentences where the parents had to underline the part of the sentence they were in agreement with; for example, whether it is useful for their child to speak GC or not. The questionnaire was in Greek and was translated into English for the purposes of this study.

4. Results

In general, the results of this study seem to reflect the language attitudes and practices of speakers in diglossic settings. Namely, the majority of the respondents report generally using GC (84.4%) while a smaller number reported using SMG (15.6%). This is justified by the fact that the linguistic situation of Cyprus is diglossic where the low variety, GC, is the native variety of Greek-Cypriots and it is used in most domains, mainly informal, while the high variety, SMG, is used in fewer domains, mainly formal (Arvaniti, 2006). The participants state using SMG in occasions such as in writing (emails or texting), when speaking with Greeks or travelling to Greece, in professional meetings (workplace, interviews, giving presentations), when talking on the phone or answering the phone. Also, it seems that Greek-Cypriots use the formal variety when they do not know their interlocutor, for example, in situations such as when talking to strangers or ordering food. On the other hand, the participants state using GC in everyday communication with friends, co-workers and family, especially grandparents, with other Cypriot parents, at home, outside and inside the house. More specifically, the selection between SMG and GC seems to highly depend not only on the interlocutor (whether they are older or unfamiliar to the speaker) but also on which variety the interlocutors use in the specific context-situation.

The main purpose of this study is to find out which variety/varieties parents use at home with their children and which variety/varieties they encourage their children to use in general. Investigating this is important as parents play a crucial role in guiding their children's language use. When parents were asked which variety they use at home with their children in various situations, most of them stated using mostly SMG in situations such as narrating or reading a story, singing with their children, teaching something to their children and giving advice. They stated using both varieties when playing, praising, giving instructions, telling off, disciplining and discussing during a meal. Generally, the results show that both varieties are used at home with SMG being more prevalent in reading, telling stories and singing, as most books and songs are in fact in the high variety, SMG. The results also show that some parents associate the use of SMG with being 'serious' or 'strict' and they state to use SMG with their children in serious conversations or when they try to explain something to them in order to sound strict. The use of the formal variety in serious conversations has also been found in other studies, which reveal that diglossic speakers also tend to associate the standard variety with the trait of seriousness. In fact, some studies in Cyprus show that Greek-Cypriots consider the use of GC as humorous (Papapavlou, 1998; Kyriakou, 2016), traits not usually associated with the standard.

With reference to which variety/varieties parents encourage their children to use, this seems to be essentially connected to academic performance. To illustrate this, the results show that most parents report encouraging their children to use either both SMG and GC, or SMG. In fact, nobody states to encourage their children to use only GC. This attitude could be rather expected as in diglossic situations, the low variety is not a standardised variety, it is not considered a sophisticated form of language and therefore it lacks prestige (Ferguson, 1959). When looking at the results, it is noticeable that a great number of parents think that speaking SMG to their children will help them with their writing skills. Parents justify this by stating that children are constantly in contact with GC therefore using SMG in more domains could contribute at improving their writing skills in SMG. In other words, parents seem to be concerned that if their children do not have enough exposure to SMG in their preschool years, this may have a negative impact on their school performance and particularly on their written expression. Similarly, some parents think that children become confused when using both SMG and GC vocabulary; therefore when speaking SMG at home will help children perform better as they will speak and write in the same way (in SMG). An interesting comment was made by a parent who said that he corrects his son when he uses the verb 'hit' in GC because when he starts school, his son will probably use in writing the GC form 'I hit' ('Εφάτισα') instead of the SMG form 'I hit' ('κτύπησα'). For this reason, the parent says that he prefers using the SMG form as this is more correct.

Other parents with similar views state that:

'We consider it (SMG) more correct. Also, I think that we, Cypriots, have issues with expression in comparison with children from Greece who speak and write in the same way in all occasions and they do not have to translate in their mind from Cypriot to Greek'. [Τη θεωρούμε πιο σωστή γλώσσα. Επίσης, θεωρώ πως εμείς οι Κύπριοι έχουμε πρόβλημα στην έκφραση σε σχέση με τα παιδιά από Ελλάδα που μιλούν και γράφουν το ίδιο σε όλες τις περιπτώσεις και δεν χρειάζεται να μεταφράζουν στο μυαλό τους από Κυπριακά σε Ελληνικά].

This implies that parents wish for their children to be fluent in Greek and in order to achieve this, they need more exposure to SMG from a young age. Some parents also state that they sometimes use the formal variety at home on purpose, so that their children familiarise themselves with it. Some parents report: 'when I address my child I try to avoid using heavy GC; I try to avoid it anyway, therefore I do not use it when addressing my child' [όταν απευθύνομαι στο παιδί προσπαθώ να αποφεύγω τη χρήση βαριάς κυπριακής διαλέκτου- έτσι και αλλιώς την αποφεύγω, πόσο δε μάλλον όταν απευθύνομαι στο παιδί] while others state that 'we speak the dialect but we correct some words' [μιλάμε τη διάλεκτο μας αλλά διορθώνουμε και κάποιες λεξούλες]. The 'correctness' of SMG emerges throughout the data in instances where parents ask their children to 'speak SMG correctly'. The parents' reported practices and use of specific expressions in the questionnaires such as 'heavy Cypriot dialect' or 'correcting words', among others, point towards the ideology of the standard language (Milroy, 2007), namely, parents associate the high/standard variety with concepts of education and 'speaking correctly'. Also, attributing competence and correctness to the speakers of the high variety is a common attitude in diglossic situations (Ferguson, 1959); this has been shown in other studies in Cyprus (Papapavlou, 1998; Kyriakou, 2016; Fotiou and Ayiomamitou, 2021).

Furthermore, some parents seem to be more relaxed in terms of which variety they use with their children, as their children do not seem to confuse the two varieties. In fact, some parents report encouraging their children to use both varieties and particularly the use of SMG, and justify this by stating that their children should be able to distinguish the two varieties and to be able to communicate in any given occasion. For example, some parents stress that it is important to know both forms of SMG and GC such as 'το κουκούτσι' αλλά και 'η κοκκώνα' (fruit seed) as they live in Cyprus. Some parents state 'children must speak both varieties and speak SMG correctly' [και τα δύο, εξίσου σημαντικό να γνωρίζει την κυπριακή διάλεκτο αλλά και να μάθει να μιλά ορθά την ελληνική γλώσσα] 'I would say both. I have been trying to speak proper Greek with them since they were little so that they are able to distinguish between the two, the language and the dialect [Θα έλεγα και τα δύο. Από μικρά προσπαθώ να τους μιλά "σωστά" Ελληνικά και να μπορούν να διαχωρίζουν τα δύο, τη γλώσσα και τη διάλεκτο]. In fact, research suggests that explicit teaching of the differences between the two varieties can bring about good results in the students' school performance and confidence (Yiakoumetti, 2007). In other words, in contrast to common belief, what most parents are concerned about, being able to distinguish between Standard Greek and the Cypriot dialect, could in reality be beneficial for the students, not only regarding their academic performance and confidence but also creating citizens/speakers whose native variety is valued and worth being taught.

While parents explain why they encourage their children to use SMG, GC or both, they connect the use of these varieties with cultural, linguistic and ethnic identity and express very positive attitudes towards both varieties. These parents stress the fact that GC is a Greek variety, they consider the two varieties as one and they seem to connect the use of GC to their Cypriot and Greek ethnic identity. These parents say that they try to teach their children both SMG and GC since GC is 'our dialect', 'our mother tongue' and also a part of their ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity, history and heritage. In multilingual settings, many parents consider their heritage language as the main carrier of their own culture, religion and family values (Yan, 2003). Interestingly, a parent reports:

'Both. In my view, the Greek-Cypriot dialect is part of our Greek identity and therefore cannot be in opposition with that (GC). Just think how many Cypriot words have roots in Ancient Greek. For me, there is no dilemma as to what is best or what we should be using, as we often hear. I would say that my family uses SMG more in everyday life (probably because of my job), but I think that the Greek Cypriot dialect must not be left out, to shut. I try to teach my child, whenever is possible words in both GC and SMG'. This seems to work for now – I have not noticed any confusion in the way he uses vocabulary'.

[Και τα δύο. Κατά την άποψή μου η κυπριακή διάλεκτος είναι κομμάτι της ελληνικής μας ταυτότητας και επομένως δεν έρχεται σε αντίθεση με αυτήν. Αρκεί μόνο να σκεφτούμε πόσες λέξεις της κυπριακής έχουν τις ρίζες τους στα αρχαία ελληνικά. Για μένα, δεν υπάρχει κάποιο δίλημμα ως προς το τι είναι καλύτερο ή τι πρέπει να χρησιμοποιούμε, όπως συχνά ακούμε. Θα έλεγα ότι στην καθημερινότητα της οικογένειάς μου υπερισχύει η χρήση της ελληνικής (ίσως και λόγω του επαγγέλματός μου), όμως θεωρώ παράλληλα ότι η κυπριακή διάλεκτος δεν πρέπει να αφεθεί, να σβήσει. Προσπαθώ να μαθαίνω στο παιδί μου, όπου αυτό ισχύει, τις λέξεις και στην κυπριακή και στην ελληνική. Αυτό φαίνεται να δουλεύει για την ώρα - δεν έχω παρατηρήσει να υπάρχει κάποιο μπερδεμα στον τρόπο που χρησιμοποιεί το λεξιλόγιό του γενικά].

In the present study, parents were also asked to state which variety they consider is more important for their children to speak. The results show that most parents encourage their children to use SMG or both SMG and GC, while nobody seems to consider that it is more important for their children to speak only SMG. Similarly, the respondents had to state whether they are proud of speaking GC or not. The majority stated being proud of speaking GC. Similarly most parents stated being proud of speaking SMG. Research in Cyprus shows that Greek-Cypriot speakers tend to connect the use of GC and SMG to their Greek ethnic identity and highlight the connection between GC and SMG and the Greek-Cypriot education (Ioannidou, 2009a).

Discussion

This study focuses on the examination of preliminary results on the reported language use of parents of preschool children, an understudied group of speakers. The purpose here is to find out which variety/ies these parents report using particularly at home with their children and whether they encourage their children to use GC, SMG or both. This is an important matter as children form attitudes towards languages from a young age and they are central to the development of their language proficiency (Cummins 2002). In general, the results show that parents use both SMG and GC, they have positive attitudes towards both varieties, although the majority state that they promote the use of SMG at home with preschool children. In fact, they seem to be proud of their dialect, and consider it part of their linguistic, cultural and ethnic identity. They encourage the use of SMG at home so that their children are linguistically ready and well-equipped to start their education in primary school where the language of instruction is SMG. Nobody encourages their children to use only GC which can be seen as a reflection of diglossia where the low variety, in this case, GC, carries no overt prestige (Ferguson, 1959) and it is not connected to academic performance and to domains of use typically reserved to the standard language like telling or reading a story and singing. What strongly emerges in this preliminary study is the ideology of the standard language (Milroy, 2007). Namely, the strong encouragement towards the use of SMG by the parents resides in the fact that SMG is a language with prestige, social values, and it is widely considered as a sophisticated form of a language.

GC seems to have more of a sentimental value rather than a functional one, an essential position in their hearts. Parents consider GC to be part of their history, a cultural heritage that needs to be preserved and also part of their linguistic and ethnic identity. The results of this research are in line with recent studies suggesting that attitudes towards GC are becoming more positive than before (Tsiplakou, 2004; Kyriakou, 2015). In addition, although parents use both varieties with their children, the use of the high variety, SMG, is tied to the domain of education, which is rather expected in a diglossic setting such as Cyprus. The standard language is associated with academic success, social mobility and professional opportunities. Parents' reported linguistic practices and attitudes could suggest that they are upwardly mobile people, that is, they wish for their children to move up socially in terms of professional status.

Briefly, parents of preschool children appear to be proud of speaking SMG and GC, emphasizing that GC is part of their linguistic, cultural and ethnic identity. They use the dialect in everyday communicative exchanges, but also encourage their children to use both varieties and SMG, clearly for academic purposes. This view is in fact in opposition with research in Cyprus education supporting that bidialectal education, namely, the explicit instruction of both standard and non-standard varieties, can in reality bring better academic results and also make children more confident linguistically and strengthen their sense of linguistic and ethnic identity (Yiakoumetti, 2007). What could be further investigated in the future is whether this view is merely the parents' concern for their children's academic success or whether educators also transmit or contribute to the formation of these views.

5. Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the language attitudes and practices of Greek-Cypriot parents of preschool children, a group infrequently addressed in existing sociolinguistic literature. The findings reveal a complex interplay between cultural identity, educational concerns, and social ideologies. While parents express pride in both SMG and GC, their reported practices lean toward promoting SMG at home, particularly in contexts linked to literacy and academic preparation. In other words, parents are concerned that limited exposure to SMG could make schooling more difficult for Greek-Cypriot children as they mainly use GC at home and on informal occasions and once they start school they need to switch to SMG as this is the official language of Cyprus.

This phenomenon emphasises the enduring power of the standard language ideology in diglossic settings, where the high variety is connected to prestige, correctness, and success, while the low variety, although valued emotionally and culturally, is seen as less suitable for formal contexts. Interestingly, even those parents who value GC as part of their identity and heritage often associate its use with informality and sentiment rather than educational utility.

The findings of this study support that language ideologies are deeply embedded and influence early language socialisation. However, they also suggest the need for increased awareness and potential pedagogical reform so that Greek-Cypriot children are explicitly aware of the differences between SMG and GC. Given that bidialectal education has been shown to improve both linguistic performance and self-esteem, policymakers and educators could consider integrating GC more explicitly in early education as this can also contribute to maintaining positive attitudes towards both varieties, valuing their cultural, linguistic and ethnic identity and heritage.

Future research could explore preschool children's and their parents' language use in the home setting to find out whether these results align or diverge from the results of this study. Equally important is to study further how teachers' language practices and attitudes align with or diverge from those of parents, and how these collective beliefs shape children's developing language

identities and competencies. Ultimately, supporting both SMG and GC in educational and home settings could foster a more inclusive approach to linguistic diversity in Cyprus, one that respects both function and heritage.

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