Caribbean writers remain very aware of the power of the varied past: dialectal and creole forms mingle with Standard English in the works of poets, novelists and – most of all – playwrights. Non-standard forms are now a vital asset to the creative genius of the Caribbean literary imagination.

**Further reading**


JEAN D’COSTA

**Language (Cyprus)**

The use of English in Cyprus can only be understood against a complex historical and synchronic background. The fabric of languages in Cyprus follows, to a large extent, the variety of ethnic groups on the island. The dominant Greek-Cypriot community (roughly 73% of the less than 1 million people of the island) have Greek as their mother tongue, while the second biggest group, the Turkish-Cypriots (roughly 11%), speak Turkish. Settlers from Turkey installed after the 1974 Turkish invasion, another 12% of the total population, must also be assumed to be Turkish speakers.) Three religious groups are also officially recognized as minorities (1% of the population): Maronites, speakers of a local Arab dialect, the Armenians, speakers of a western Armenian variant, and a small group of inhabitants of European origin, known as ‘Latinos’, now speakers of Greek. Greek citizens amount to about 3% of the population.

This picture is, however, complicated for a number of reasons. First of all, both the majority language, Greek, and that of the second biggest group, Turkish, are themselves ‘minoritized’ in respect to their standard varieties spoken on the motherlands’, i.e. mainland Greece and Turkey, in very simple terms we can speak of ‘diglossia’ on the island between local and standard Greek/Standard Turkish.

In fact, at least for Cypriot Greek, there seems to be a regional form of the standard language. In this respect, other local or foreign languages like Maronite Arabic or English are perceived as twice-removed from an idealized standard.

This perception of standard and local varieties is also related to the multiple, symbolic significance of Greek and Turkish for the identity construction of the respective national communities. In modern times, the relation between language and ethnicity in both communities has always referred to the supra-local in terms of allegiance and competed with the local ‘other’ for its definition. As a result, the use of a ‘foreign’ language like English is always related to questions of identity, if not straightforwardly discussed in nationalistic terms.

At the same time, inter-ethnic conflict and the prolonged lack of contact between members of the two main ethnic groups have created serious obstacles in the expansion of bilingualism and/or the development of a lingua franca such as English. The dramatic geo-demographic changes that followed the Turkish invasion have had significant consequences for the use of languages and their perceived status. Thus, while Greek and Turkish are the two official languages in the 1960 Constitution, in practice the division of the island has been followed by a division of linguistic labour, with the result that Greek has been the dominant language in the administration and government of the Republic of Cyprus, and Turkish is exclusively used for similar purposes in the occupied part.

Idestologies of historical memory and/or oblivion have also had significant consequences on the linguistic practices of the displaced populations and on personal choices as regards the transmission of local features to subsequent generations. Another effect has been that the role of English has been considerably diminished in administration, legislation and public discourse over the past three decades.

An opposite force has been language contact in the migrant communities of Greek-Cypriots outside Cyprus – e.g. in London and Australia – or Turkish-Cypriots abroad. (One third of the initial Turkish Cypriot population is estimated to have emigrated and is currently living abroad.) In these communities, language use seems to follow the typical developmental pattern of first-, second- and third-generation immigrants being progressively assimilated to the majority language of the country in which they live. Linguistic innovations are bound to develop in this situation, such as the
systematic code mixing in the lyrics of the original rapper Mike Hadjimike, mainly promoted through the London Greek Radio (LGR).

English is not only the imported colonial language of the past. It is also spoken by the Cypriot repatriate and the British expatriate communities, the military staff of the British sovereign bases, and is a lingua franca for large numbers of foreign residents from areas such as the Indian subcontinent and Eastern Europe. Considering the forces of globalization in favour of English, its penetration in Cyprus is rather limited, as it yields to strong ethno-linguistic loyalty among Greek-Cypriots. However, phenomena that result from contact with English such as lexical borrowing or code switching have been serious subjects of preoccupation. For instance, there has been a strong apprehension about the effects of the English influence on both the structure and the status of Greek. The influx of immigrant workers, in both the Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish occupied areas, has also had important consequences for language usage and communicative patterns. As regards the Greek-Cypriot community, questions are often raised about changes in traditional patterns of social behaviour, such as child breeding, and their linguistic impact. The employment of English-speaking female house workers (mostly as child carers and maids) from the Philippines and Sri Lanka is perceived as having a disastrous effect on children’s linguistic development (loss of fluency in Greek) and the use of Greek at home. The development of a tourist society, with numbers of tourists almost quadrupling the island’s population each year, is also a major source of concern. Actual usage shows, in fact, a much more complex pattern of linguistic behaviour. Recent studies indicate that the presence of English in Cypriot-Greek conversations mainly includes small-scale borrowing. Instances of large-scale language alternation, when they occur, have a strategic function in content; they constitute part of complex argumentation moves relating to self- and other-presentation, revealing the speakers’ concerns with account and narration and evoking varying frames of stance and alignment. The use of English in Cypriot-Greek conversation offers thus a useful resource for increasing the speakers’ stylistic repertoire. At the same time, English is the most popular foreign language; it is learned by all students in public education (where some 1000 children are reported bilingual in Greek and English) and is the language of instruction in many private institutes.

Language use and contact in Cyprus are imbued with symbolic value and are intricately related to issues of history, culture and identity. The use of a language like English is thus situated in a complex discursive space developed in the creation of social, political and personal identities through linguistic acts.

Further reading
Dionysis Goutsos and Marilena Karyolaimou (eds), The Sociolinguistics of Cyprus, Special Issue of the International Journal of the Sociology of Language (forthcoming).

DIONYSIS GOUTSOS

Language (Hong Kong)

The distinctive demographics of language and society in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) are directly related to Hong Kong’s recently-concluded colonial experience (1842–1997). The most recent census statistics (2001) reveal that the majority ‘usual’ language of the home, i.e. ‘first language’, is Cantonese (89.2 per cent of the population), followed by other Chinese dialects (5.5 per cent), English (3.2 per cent) and Putonghua (0.9 per cent). However, the numbers of ‘bilinguals’ or ‘trilinguals’ in the HKSAR is significant, and the total of those claiming at least a functional command of the three languages is as follows: Cantonese 96.1 per cent; English 43.0 per cent; Putonghua 34.1 per cent. What distinguishes Hong Kong from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is the unique symbiosis between Cantonese and English that exists in the HKSAR. Historically the broad situation was that, in colonial Hong Kong, ‘Cantonese’ was allowed to evolve and elaborate its functions as a ‘high’ language of education, government, broadcasting and popular culture, in a way denied to the Canton (Guangdong) dialect across the border in cities such as Guangzhou, where the use of Putonghua
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