

History of English and English Studies in Cyprus

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Many languages have been used in the island of Cyprus throughout its history. The original Cypriots spoke a language whose script has not been deciphered and may be related to the language of Minoan Crete. Greeks and Phoenicians arrived on the island around the beginning of the first millennium BC and brought their languages with them. The languages of other rulers of antiquity—Assyrians, Egyptians, Persians—are hardly documented. There was a large Jewish community on the island that became Greek-speaking during the Hellenic and Roman period. With the division of the Roman Empire Cyprus became part of the Byzantine Empire until 1191, when it was conquered by the crusader Richard the Lionheart, who in 1192 sold it to the Knights Templar, who in turn sold it to Guy de Lusignan in the same year. The French period on the island lasted three centuries. French became the language of the court and the ruling class, while Catholicism became the official religion and Latin the language of the clergy. The indigenous population retained the Cypriot dialect form of Greek, and Italian dialects were used for trade in the coastal towns, where some Italians settled. The Venetian economic presence became especially strong and eventually the Venetians took control of the island in 1489. They ruled the island until it was conquered by the Ottomans in 1571.

In 1878, the Treaty of Berlin gave administration of the island to Britain and the language of the new rulers gained ground.² Cyprus remained part of the Ottoman Empire until it was annexed by Britain with the outbreak of the First World War. In 1923, Turkey relinquished claims to Cyprus and in 1925 the island was declared a Crown Colony. An interesting perspective on this multilayered cultural and linguistic history may be found in the *Excerpta Cypria*—an anthology of writing on Cyprus translated by Cobham, commissioner of Larnaca, and published in 1908. This includes excerpts translated from various languages into English from Strabo to the Ottoman rule; in the eyes of travellers, settlers, Cypriots or conquerors, the anthology evokes the cross-cultural gaze on the island through the millennia (Cobham 1908).

The advent of British rule in combination with the Cypriot diaspora created a form of cultural cosmopolitanism. The first printing press (a gift from Alexandrian Greeks) and consequently the first newspaper (published in Greek and English), was established on the island in the 1880s. Radio and TV broadcasting were also established by the British Colonial Government in 1952 and 1957, broadcasting in Greek, Turkish, and English—and was at first unpopular as it was seen as a propaganda tool for the colonial government. The press became a catalyst for literary modernity and in the period 1880-1930, which coincides approximately with the first half-century of British rule, more than 900 texts by about 400 writers were translated by 150 *literati* into Greek.³ These include European classical and contemporary literature and Eastern literature (mainly Arabic and Persian). English education in Cyprus and Cypriots studying in British Universities were important catalysts in this literary activity. In addition, there was a Cypriot diaspora in Egypt, Asia Minor and the Levant with knowledge of Eastern languages and cultures that had an impact on this activity. These communities of the East Mediterranean Cypriot diaspora dissolved in the course of the twentieth century for various reasons, notably the Asia Minor disaster of 1922,⁴ the Suez crisis of 1956 and civil strife in Lebanon in the 1970s and 1980s. The colonial cultural cosmopolitanism of Cypriot literary modernity subsequently gave way to fervent nationalism. The separate nationalisms of the two main ethnic communities defined the anti-colonial movement. Independence was gained in 1960 and Greek and Turkish were made the official languages of the new Republic. English was relegated to foreign language status, although for a large part of the population it was a second language. Its status between second and foreign language is still a question. Primary and secondary education was controlled by the two main communities since before independence and their respective languages were the media of instruction. Where national institutions were established in the 1960s serving all ethnic groups, such as the Higher Hotel Institute of Cyprus and the Higher Technical Institute, then English was the medium of instruction (Davy & Pavlou 2001).

Independence was followed by the violent ethnic conflicts of 1963, 1967 and 1974. In 1974, the Greek military junta instigated a coup against the Cypriot government, and Turkey invaded invoking its rights as one of the guarantor States under the Zurich Agreement. This led to the partition of the island and the dislocation of forty percent of the population. The role of nationalism has continued since then to be a strong force in defining cultural practices, both written and oral. Cypriots of all

communities scattered to the nations of the world, and especially English-speaking countries. In the late 1980s and 1990s, the Greek-Cypriot south used its international legal recognition as the Republic of Cyprus to engineer post-war recovery and prosperity. The southern part of the island became a prosperous tourist destination with numbers of tourists almost quadrupling the island's population each year, and in addition it became a tax haven for offshore companies thus attracting trans-national capital. Economic growth attracted migrants in large numbers mainly from South and East Asia (who came to work as domestic servants), and post-communist Eastern Europe. In northern Cyprus, as a response to post-1974 economic and political isolation and depopulation, thousands of settlers were brought from Turkey (Balasopoulos & Stephanides 2005).

These huge demographic changes since 1974 have reshaped the linguistic, cultural, religious and sexual codes of Cypriot society. The use of English in Cyprus can only be understood against this complex historical and synchronic background. At present, the fabric of languages in Cyprus follows, to a large extent, the variety of ethnic groups on the island. The dominant Cypriot Greek community (roughly 73 % of the less than 1 million people of the island) have Greek as their mother tongue, while Turkish is the mother tongue of the Cypriot Turks (roughly 11 %) and Turkish settlers (an estimated 12 % of the total population). Three other ethnic groups are also officially recognized as minorities and constitute about 1 % of the population: the Maronites, Christians from the Levant settling here in the medieval period and speaking a local Arab dialect as well as Cypriot Greek, the Armenians, speakers of a western Armenian variety as well as English and/or Greek, and a small group of inhabitants of European origin, known as 'Latins', now speakers of Greek. Other ethnic groups who have settled in Cyprus constitute about 3 % of the population.

This neat picture of correspondence between ethnic groups and languages is, however, complicated for a number of reasons. First of all, both the majority language, Greek, and that of the second biggest ethnic group, Turkish, are themselves 'minoritized' with respect to their standard varieties spoken in the 'motherlands', i.e. mainland Greece and Turkey. In very simple terms, we can speak of a 'twin diglossia' on the island between local varieties and Standard Greek/Standard Turkish (Goutsos & Karyolaimou 2005). In practice, at least for Cypriot Greek, there seems to be a continuum of usages that extends from various local and/or localized forms of the dialect to 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 related to the symbolic significance of Greek and Turkish and the identity construction of the respective ethnic 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. 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 occupation since 1974 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. Ideologies 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.

As a result of its being relegated foreign language status and not third official language since independence, the role of English has been considerably diminished in administration, legislation and public discourse over the past three decades. The use of English is always related to questions of identity (Sciriha 1996), if not always straightforwardly discussed in nationalistic terms. Nonetheless, 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 in Cyprus, including the various migrants from Asia and Eastern Europe. Cypriot Greeks and Turks, who have returned to the South and to the North from English-speaking countries, often bringing their children with them, are frequently bilingual and bicultural as are many Cypriots who have been educated abroad. Those who have no experience of living abroad speak English to varying degrees of proficiency from minimal competence to a reasonably high standard. Proficiency may depend on social class or ethnic attitudes.

Contact with English such as lexical borrowing or code switching have been serious subjects of preoccupation among those Cypriot Greeks with strong ethno-linguistic loyalty. For instance, there has been a strong apprehension against the effects of the English influence both on the structure and the status of Greek. The influx of immigrant workers, both in the Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish occupied areas, has also had important consequences for language usage and communicative patterns. As regards the Cypriot Greek community, questions are often raised about changes in traditional patterns of social behaviour, such as child upbringing, 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 often perceived as having a disastrous effect on children's linguistic development and the use of Greek at home.

Actual usage shows, in fact, a much more complex pattern of linguistic behaviour. Recent studies (Goutsos 2001) indicate that the presence of English in Cypriot Greek conversations mainly includes small-scale borrowing and stereotypical sequential rather than more complex interpersonal functions. Instances of large-scale language alternation, when they occur, have a strategic function in the text; 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.

Language use in the migrant communities of Cypriots outside Cyprus, such as Britain and Australia, 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 between Greek and English in the lyrics of the original rapper *Mike Hadjimike*, mainly promoted through the *London Greek Radio* (LGR).

There are a number of private schools which use English as the medium of instruction, and for the most part following the British system of education. These attract children of mixed parentage, the wealthier immigrants, foreign residents and some Cypriots from elite or more cosmopolitan minded groups. Most of the latter are attracted to the *English School* of Nicosia—originally the colonial school that catered to the governing class but is now Cypriot run and receiving some

government subsidies. At the same time, English is the most popular foreign language learned by all students in public education from fourth grade of primary school. English was first partially introduced in primary schools in 1935, but taken out because of anti-British feeling during the EOKA⁵ struggle in 1955-59. It was re-introduced as part of the official syllabus in 1965-66 (Ioannou-Georgiou & Pavlou 1999). Currently, in public education, there are reported some thousand children bilingual in Greek and English, and the increasing number of immigrant children in Cypriot schools has also brought new challenges to an educational system that has been traditionally ethnocentric in its focus. Cypriot Turks who grew up and were educated during the British colonial period and the pre-1974 Cyprus Republic, acquired Greek as well as English, and largely see English as a prestige language. Their children may have had some experience of a united island, and were brought up to speak English to a high standard through family values, and an education system, such as the *Turk Maarif College* system that continued to make primary use of English as the medium of instruction. Private schools in the north have continued to put considerable emphasis on English, though declining standards are discussed widely, particularly in the State system.

Due to post-colonial conflict and division, there was no State University on the island until the establishment of the *University of Cyprus* that admitted its first students in 1992. There was considerable debate on the appropriateness of delivering university education in English, and eventually Greek and Turkish were established as the official languages. In practice, this meant Greek, because the Cypriot Turkish population live north of the partition line. Peculiarly, Humanities at the University of Cyprus is divided into two Schools, one with a Greek orientation and the other with an international one. The School of Philosophy (translated as the Faculty of Letters in the English-language prospectus) primarily focuses on Greek Studies (classical, Byzantine and modern) as well as literature, history, archaeology and philosophy, while the School (or Faculty) of Humanities offers degree programmes in English Studies, French Studies and Turkish Studies, as well as instruction in a range of other languages. Nonetheless, the University of Cyprus established English Language and Literature as one of its first degree programmes as well as a compulsory foreign language requirement for all undergraduate students. Although a range of foreign languages are offered, inevitably English remains the most popular foreign language to satisfy this requirement. The Department of English

Studies currently employs 13 full-time academics and has about 140 students registered for the BA degree in English Language and Literature, and about 20 students registered in MA and PhD programmes in different areas of English (literary, linguistic, translation and cultural studies).

Prior to the establishment of the University of Cyprus, there were only private colleges of higher education whose language of instruction was English and catering to international students (mainly Asian) as well as Cypriots. Most Cypriot High School graduates would go abroad for University education, both to Europe and North America, but the vast majority to Greece and the United Kingdom. More recently, the private colleges have been in the process of evaluation to receive State accreditation for their degree programmes and some eventually University status. *Cyprus College* and *Intercollege* have recently received accreditation for degree programmes in English language and literature.

In the North, many private universities have been established since 1974. The language of instruction for most degree programmes is English. As well as Cypriot Turkish students, the universities also attract many students from Turkey and the Middle East. The majority of students are from Turkey, where there is difficulty in meeting the demand for higher education because of a population with a high percentage of young people. Often students need to supplement their English with a year of preparatory English before starting their degree programmes. The partially state-funded *Eastern Mediterranean University* is probably the most successful in providing an English medium education and also offers a degree programme in English Studies. The Department of English Literature and Humanities (ELH) at *Eastern Mediterranean University* was established in 1989. Within the first few years, ELH generated what would become the Department of English Language Teaching, and the Faculty of Communications. In addition to its BA and MA programmes in English Literature and Humanities, ELH introduced a new Cultural Studies-based BA programme in Translation and Interpretation in 2005. Currently, ELH employs 7 full-time PhD staff-members serving a student population of 270 undergraduates, and 20 graduate students. The Department's intellectual focus primarily revolves around comparative literature, critical theory, cultural studies, philosophy, and linguistics. ELH staff-members also provide a number of required courses for the Department of English Language Teaching, serving a population of approximately 230 students. Although the Republic of Cyprus does not recognize Universities in the North, because

of the question of giving official political recognition to the North as a separate State, the Association of European Universities has recently admitted the EMU among its members, arguing that the political issue should be separated from the academic.

It is evident that language use and contact in Cyprus are imbued with symbolic value and are intricately related to issues of history, culture, ethnicity, post-coloniality and identity (Goutsos & Karyolaimou 2004, Papapavlou 2005). 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. Accession to the European Union has opened up the possibilities of English language education a little more. For instance, the State has recently allowed the University of Cyprus to offer some postgraduate degree programmes in English, provided the same are offered in Greek in alternate years. The opening up of the check points between the northern and southern parts of the island has provided renewed possibilities of English as a lingua franca between the two main ethnic communities on the island. Perhaps there is a need for a move toward a hybrid system that will allow students to acquire education in their native language, as well as allowing Cypriot Greek and Turks to study together, and also allowing the possibility to attract international students without precluding the possibility that they acquire the local languages and cultures. For this move to take place, the current relationship between nation, culture and state need to be challenged in education in ways that they sometimes are in the activities of independent artists and intellectuals. The book *Step-Mothertongue* (Yashin 2000) explores the literary dimension of this multiculturalism, as does the literary journal *Cadences* (ed. Thompson) established in 2004, which publishes writing in Greek, Turkish and English as well as translations between these languages and sees itself as a bridge and meeting point between the diverse communities and languages of the island. How the pressures and constraints of a changing world will affect the osmosis of languages, cultures and communities still remains to be seen. The effects of globalization and migration, the European Union, the possible EU accession of Turkey, the changing relationship between North and South all have a role to play.

Notes

- 1 We are very grateful to John Eldridge, Asst. Chair, Department of General Education, Eastern Mediterranean University, for providing us with valuable information and perspectives on English and English Studies in northern Cyprus, and to

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- 2 For more detailed information on English in the British colonial period and post-colonial Cyprus see Routledge's *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English* (2nd ed.), which includes an introduction to Cyprus and ten other entries in the sections on Broadcasting, Cultural Journalism, Drama, Film and Literature, Folklore, Language, Memoirs, Poetry, Translation, Travel Writing. Stephanides is the regional editor for Cyprus and Dionysis Goutsos the author of the entry on language.
- 3 In contrast to the import of foreign texts, the post-1974 period translation in the South supported by the State and the literary establishment has focused on Greek-Cypriot literature into foreign languages. An effort to construct a national literature for export was undertaken by Cyprus PEN, which has produced a series of anthologies into English (Stephanides 2000). A project of translation (into English) and anthologizing of Cypriot Turkish literature is currently underway in the North with Mehmet Yashin as coordinator.
- 4 Asia Minor Disaster is the name the Greeks give us for the defeat of the Greek Army in 1922 in the Greco-Turkish War of 1919-1922, and the subsequent expulsion of the Greek presence from Asia Minor. It was estimated that after a three thousand year presence, the Greek population of Asia Minor was two and half million. The ensuing peace Treaty signed at Lausanne in 1923 between Greece and the Allies on the one hand, and Turkey on the other, involved exchange of territories and a separate agreement between Greece and Turkey for the compulsory exchange of ethnic minorities. The populations expelled suffered greatly, in a move to essentially consolidate the modern nation-states of Greece and Turkey, and to ethnically homogenize their populations.
- 5 EOKA (Εθνική Οργάνωσις Κυπρίων Αγωνιστών / Ethniki Organosis Kypriou Agoniston, Greek for National Organization of Cypriot Fighters) was a Greek Cypriot organization that fought for the expulsion of British troops from the island, for self-determination, and for union with Greece.

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