

# The Seduction of the Dialect in Visual Communication: Greek Cypriot Dialect in Print Advertisements

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## Introduction

Is it possible that a dialect can have a greater appeal than an official language? The answer appears to be positive, given that the dialect appears to be used more often as a semiotic tool in mass communication, and especially in advertising communication. Actually, although, in terms of communication, the study of language systems (standard languages, dialects, accents, etc.) falls under the sphere of sociolinguistics, these systems' use in advertising messages suffice to highlight their semiotic dimension. Barthes (1964b: 101) considers advertising to be one of the systems of mass communication in which the senses are subject to an influx of images and graphic forms. But what happens when these visual signs and graphic signs are relegated to second place in communication when compared with the verbal message, as is the case with certain Greek-Cypriot advertisements?

In order to promote their advertised products, advertisers have made unexpected use of dialect in their advertising communication, setting aside the official language system, Modern Greek (MG) in favour of a variety of the Greek language, the Greek Cypriot Dialect (GCD), which is the consumers' mother tongue. Kelly-Holmes (2005: 109) believes that using the informal language system in advertising is meant to "create a feeling of community and to associate it with a particular product". This choice is consistent with Magariños de Morentin's (1987: 503) observation that the use of dialect in advertising messages constitutes "extra-advertising semiosis". It is this extra-advertising semiosis that we plan to study in Greek Cypriot print advertisements published in the last two years, focussing our attention on the semiotic use of the verbal message and the typographic choices made with it in mind.

## The seduction of the dialect

The reason that sociolinguistics haven't excluded semiotics from the study of linguistic communication is because semiotics assist in promoting the ideology of the language. As St. Clair (1979: 9) quite aptly states,

[...] sociolinguistics is also a semiotic enterprise [...]. It includes the social use of both verbal and non-verbal expressions and includes the semiotics of advertising, film, and proxemics.

Advertising is one of the favourite fields of study of semiology, or semiotics as it is now more often called, since "all advertising *says* the product but *tells* something else" (Barthes, 1994 [1985]: 178). But the function of written language is iconic, too. For this reason, it is worth also considering the semiotic aspects of typefaces, i.e. the ways that verbal messages are visualised in advertising, since as Bignell (2002 [1997]: 90) suggests, "[i]t is not just particular linguistic signs which connote speech, but also typography and layout."

No matter how much semioticians have tried to highlight the contribution of non-verbal semiotic systems in advertising communication, we shouldn't forget that the key to this communication is the verbal message. Semioticians such as Eco (1972: 171) note that the main communication function in advertising is based on the verbal message since communication through the iconic message is often ambiguous.

However, the use of dialect in advertising communication is surprising, since we expect advertisers to use the official (standard) language system when promoting an advertised product. This expectation stems from the fact that the official language system is understood by a larger segment

of the consumer public, whereas use of the dialect would limit this public. It is easy to see why Magariños de Morentin (1987) describes the use of dialect in advertising messages as “extra-advertising semiosis”.

It seems that dialect advertising is a remarkable example of how a local language system is turned into symbolic capital in the authentication of products. When dialect is used in advertising, it is often to link the product to past ages and thus underline its high quality (Rubino, 2010: 248). In fact, dialect use seems to be more closely linked to informative advertisements<sup>1</sup> for staples (bread, dairy products and meat) grown and produced in the countryside, in other words the region where geographical dialects originated from (Beal, 2006: 15-6). Similarly, Straßner (1986: 310-343) finds that in southern German newspapers dialect advertising is restricted to particular product categories, especially food and beverage, and capitalises on romantic, rural and traditional connotations. Another factor that appears to encourage dialect usage is the European Union’s stance on dialects and minority languages. As Parry mentions with regard to Italy (2010: 333):

[...] dialects are making a relative come-back, though not necessarily in traditional domains: among the new functions we find commercial exploitation in advertising to evoke traditional, authentic produce or life-styles, and new expressive uses, even among youngsters raised in Italian.

Dialect usage in advertising has been associated with positive stereotypes and connotations in metropolitan Greece, too (Stamou & Dinas, 2011: 302; Kourdis, 2012: 879). These observations coincide with Androutsopoulos’ (2010: 744) view that

[d]ialect advertising comes with different degrees of audience engagement, sometimes inviting recipients to become part of an imaginary local community.

We must not forget that myths are built on simple things. So what could help create an imaginary Greek-Cypriot community? According to Myers (1994: 112), the language of advertisements needs to be as ordinary as possible, and everyday conversation between equals seems to be most ordinary. What other language system is better able to create such an atmosphere in Cyprus than the GCD?

### The sociolinguistic status of the GCD

The singularity of Cyprus’ sociolinguistic situation lies in the coexistence of the island’s official language, MG, and the GCD, which is the mother tongue of Greek-Cypriots. However, although many Greek-Cypriots identify as a Greek race, they make a distinction between themselves and Greece’s inhabitants (going so far as to have special names for them, namely *Elladites* and *Kalamarades*) and the language Greeks speak (MG) by promoting their local identity through their use of the GCD. However, according to Karyolemou (2000: 44):

[c]ertain speakers believe this situation to be problematic: they feel that Cypriots do not speak their dialect well and have yet to learn to speak standard Greek properly; in other words, their command of either variety is unsatisfactory.

Karyolemou goes even further to make a very interesting observation. According to her (2001: 181), “[t]his vacillation only leads to open conflict when the Cypriot speakers’ local identity<sup>2</sup> is slighted.” The Greek-Cypriots’ local identity is, in fact, closely linked to their language since other socio-cultural aspects, such as religion, history (except from the period in which Cyprus was under British rule) and culture coincide or are identified with those of metropolitan Greece. That could be the reason why MG was adopted as the Greek-Cypriot community’s official language. But since MG is considered to be the language of higher education and the upper classes (Katsoyannou et al, 2007: 109; Pavlou, 1997: 619), it would be interesting, from a graphics and also a sociological perspective, to examine advertisements targeting the Greek-Cypriot market that employ verbal utterances in the GCD.

<sup>1</sup> As Sonesson (2007: 115) states “[a]ctually, it is not the amount of information that is crucial (the picture may easily carry more) but the possibility to organise it: verbal language has fixed means for conveying relative importance, newness, focus, etc.”

<sup>2</sup> Other researchers, such as Katsoyannou et al. (2007: 109) believe that the GCD serves as a symbol of the Cypriots’ *national identity*, distinguishing them from the language and culture of metropolitan Greece.

## Advertising in Cyprus

Papapavlou & Satraki (2014: 96) observe that

[b]ased on a limited available literature, one can hypothesize that Greek-Cypriots have recently begun to hold a more favourable attitude towards dialect use in advertisements, especially of products reflecting local tradition.

Papapavlou & Satraki (2014: 98) conclude that “[...] people are not absolutely negative towards the use of GCD in advertising local products [...]”. Such conjunctures of dialect, local produce and local identity indeed seem quite widespread in Cyprus. As Pavlou (2004: 112), who focussed his research on Cypriot radio commercials, characteristically mentions regarding GCD usage,

[a]dvertisements in Cypriot Dialect or containing Cypriot Dialect elements mostly occur on the radio rather than the television, whereas it must be noted that commercials in Cypriot Dialect can hardly be found in the newspapers.

The fact that the GCD is scarcely used in print advertisements may also be because, as we shall see below, there is no established, official and commonly accepted orthographical system on which to rely when rendering the dialect’s distinctive sounds typographically<sup>3</sup>. This often results in typographical confusion, and maybe even a sense of awkwardness.

Despite this fact, our research points to an upward trend in GCD usage, at least where print advertisements are concerned. This is because, as Pavlou (2004: 116) goes on to say, “[...] in a number of ads [...] the use of the dialect is thought to appeal to the target audience”. Where the GCD has been used in advertisements in Cyprus, Pavlou (2004: 113) mentions how:

[t]he products for which [the] Cypriot Dialect is used in advertising are Cypriot traditional food items such as local cheese (halloumi), yogurt, sausages etc., locally produced light industry products, which are usually in competition with imported ones, and products related to longstanding values of the traditional Cypriot society such as dowry items, products and services relating to home and home construction.

If advertisers connote regionalism and traditional values with their choice of visual iconic signs in Greek-Cypriot print advertisements (Zantides & Kourdis, 2013: 41-43), then the choice of the GCD as a linguistic sign is even more significant. In fact, Pavlou (1997: 624) identifies three aspects that favour the use of the GCD in Greek-Cypriot advertisements: the Cypriots’ love of traditional foods, the impression that Cypriot products are not inferior to their imported counterparts and are also cheaper than them, and the preservation (connotation) of traditional values. These are myths (according to Barthes, mythologies) that help build identity, and advertising contributes to this. Besides, as de Certeau (1984: 186) also believes, our society has become a recited society since, among other things, it is defined by *stories*, the fables constituted by our advertising and informational data.

### Advertisements in the Cypriot Dialect

The first advertisement (figure 3-18) we will be analysing is of the Greek-Cypriot radio station “Evrythmo”, on which the presenters host, twice a week, a two-hour programme called, *Giaourtin, karydakin dje kanela!* (“Yoghurt, walnut preserve and cinnamon!” as translated from the GCD). The programme’s subject matter is taken directly from Greek-Cypriot tradition<sup>4</sup>, a fact highlighted by its title, which harks back to Cyprus’ simpler, more traditional fare. The name of the radio station is written in white capitals inside a rectangular frame, under the station’s broadcast frequency (107.9 FM), and written in larger green numbers. We also observe an intericonic reference between the specific digital writing of the station’s number and the digital broadcasting consoles as a connotative mechanism for “radioness”. In our opinion, the capitals are there for emphasis (Tyagi & Kumar, 2004: 323), to provide a connection between the poster and the radio station. This is why Charaudeau (1991: 57) and Cook (2001: 64) stress the aggressiveness of capital letters, as opposed to the friendly

<sup>3</sup> Papapavlou & Satraki (2015: 97) observe that “[the GCD] remains unacceptable or ‘weird’ for it to appear in written form”.

<sup>4</sup> See [http://issuu.com/toutoukkinouz/docs/issue4\\_tououkkinouz](http://issuu.com/toutoukkinouz/docs/issue4_tououkkinouz).

and more personal lower case. It is interesting to see that while the radio station's name is in capitals, the advert's main verbal message "Γιαούρτιν, καρυδάκιν τζαι κανέλα!" (the radio programme's title, i.e. "yoghurt, walnut preserve and cinnamon") is written in lower-case, dark purple script. As Bertin (1983: 44) remarks, size, as well as colour, are semiotic elements that contribute to the construction of messages in graphic design. The emphasised headline in script not only connotes friendliness and 'personal' communication, but its dark purple colour also matches the colour of the t-shirt worn by the young man, who is central in the advertisement. This groups the two elements visually and provides an intersemiotic translation between the verbal and the non-verbal.



Fig. 3-18: Evrythmo radio station advertisement

The second verbal message is also in the GCD, as we can tell from the use of the Greek-Cypriot word "τζαι" (dje), meaning "and", rather than its MG counterpart "και" (ke). This second and more informative message is in smaller, black writing. It is especially interesting to see that the verbal messages are positioned in the top part of the advertisement, and even separated from the bottom, larger section with a dotted line. The part below the dotted line has iconic messages conveyed by two women in Cypriot traditional costume<sup>5</sup> and a man who appears to be tasting the island's traditional fare. The objects shown in this iconic message weren't randomly chosen; they are object-signs, since they connote Cypriotness. These objects include two reed baskets, usually used in the countryside for carrying fruit, a black vintage telephone, an old traditional cooking vessel, a gourd and a flute, as well as cinnamon sticks, a cup for serving Cypriot coffee, and a jar of walnut preserve. The two latter objects in particular represent the coffee and walnut preserve traditionally offered to visitors at Cypriot households, a cultural practice still upheld today.

It is worth focussing on the objects in the advertisement; objects which carry special meaning. For Barthes (1994: 182), "[...] there is no object which escapes meaning". He goes on to provide an apt example of a telephone which has a meaning that is independent from its function, stating that,

[...] a white telephone always transmits a certain notion of luxury or of femininity, but there are also bureaucratic telephones, old-fashioned telephones which transmit the notion of a certain period

In our case, it is through this '50s object that the notion of tradition and oldness is represented. This different era is connected in this particular advertisement with the notion of tradition, and tradition is in turn linked to the Cypriot Dialect.

The second advertisement (figure 3-19) is of the Ocean Basket restaurant chain. The main verbal message takes up the biggest part of the advertisement's composition and is written in the Cypriot Dialect: "του φρονίμου τα παιθικά πριν/άμα πεινάσουν ... παν Ocean Basket!" meaning "a prudent's children go to Ocean Basket before/when they get hungry". This is a verbal palimpsest that plays on the established saying in the Cypriot Dialect, "του φρονίμου τα παιθικά πριν πεινάσουν

<sup>5</sup> Barron, along with other researchers, mentions that advertisers have a strategy for approaching local markets. In this frame, Barron (2012: 285) mentions that "this strategy may, for instance, involve use of a local celebrity, use of a local setting, dialect or traditional costumes in advertisement". It's noteworthy that in this particular case, we have all the characteristics that are mentioned.

μαγειρεύουν”, meaning “a prudent’s children cook before they get hungry”, in other words, sensible people think ahead. Here, the utterance “πριν” (before) is replaced by “άμα” (when), and the utterance “μαγειρεύουν” (to cook) is replaced by allusive discourse (an ellipsis) and the added utterance “παν Ocean Basket!” (go to Ocean Basket!).

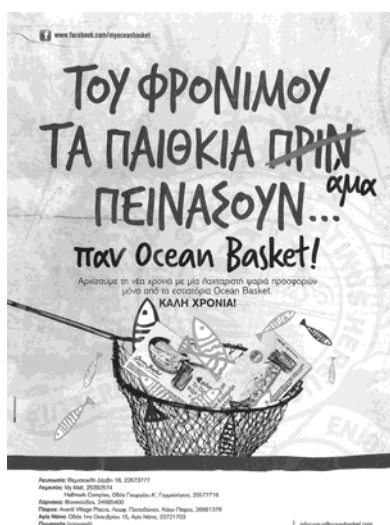


Fig. 3-19: Ocean Basket restaurant chain advertisement

Of course, this new utterance-palimpsest functions synecdochically and intertextually at the rhetorical level, since in synergy with the original utterance serve the same notion, namely food. The typography employed enhances the palimpsest effect on the Cypriot utterance, since, unlike the original utterance, which is in blue-grey capital script, the added utterances are written in lower-case script and a different colour (black). It is also interesting to notice how the line that strikes out the utterance “πριν” (before) for it to be replaced by “άμα” (when) is red, a choice that makes us think of pupils’ homework being corrected. Moreover, the utterance “Ocean” is translated intersemiotically and synecdochically at the rhetoric level by the fish inside and outside the scoop net. The informational verbal messages (the top message providing a Facebook link and the bottom message with the restaurant’s different locations) have been placed, or rather displaced, to the edges of the poster, and are written in a smaller font. The latter informational message, especially owing to its length, is placed on a white background to increase legibility (Tyagi & Kumar, 2004: 323).

In terms of graphics, a thick blue-grey line that could symbolise the sea from which the fish come separates the advertisement’s linguistic and iconic systems from the bottom informational message, which although not a participant in the advert’s anchorage function<sup>6</sup>, it nevertheless remains a secondary message since it serves a testimonial function with regard to the business’s existence and promotion in Cyprus.

The subject of the third advertisement studied (figure 3-20) is a Cypriot folk song competition organised by the bimonthly free newspaper *Toutoukki Niouz*<sup>7</sup>. The folk songs in question, called *tsiattista*, are impromptu oral poetry sung to music. The advertisement is teeming with verbal messages in the GCD. In the top section we have the introductory message “έρκεται Πάσκαν τζαι Πάσκαν χωρίς τσιάττιστά εν γίνεται” (Easter is almost here and there is no Easter without *tsiattista*). This is followed by guiding verbal messages that imitate the form of the *tsiattista* songs, with their characteristically prolonged ‘eee’ in the beginning and their rhyming end words: “Eee στο τσιάττισμα, αν θέλεις νά’σαι νικητής που της ψυσοιής τα βάθη (δισ)”, “Eee εμείς ένα σου δώκουμε για δώρον το καλάθι (δισ)”, meaning “Eee, if you want to be a *tsiattista* victor from the bottom of your heart (2x)”, “Eee, then we will give you this basket on our part (2x)”. Although in smaller letters, the competition rules (the informational text) are provided in detail and are even positioned conspicuously in the advertising composition, unlike in other such cases where they are written in the bottom margin. Also noteworthy is the fact that, although written in lower-case letters, the verbal message introducing the informational text is nevertheless in red script: “Αν έσσιεις ταλέντο τζαι περνά σου το τσιάττισμα, τότε τσιάττισε για το Πάσκα” (If you are talented and have a knack for *tsiattista*, then try it for Easter).

<sup>6</sup> See Barthes, 1964: 45.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.toutoukkinews.com>.

It could be said that the verbal messages are especially upgraded in this advert, and more so because it is an advertisement inviting readers to generate verbal messages.

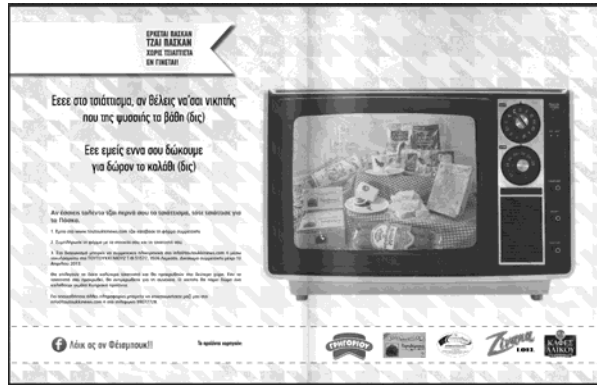


Fig. 3-20: Advertisement for a folk song competition

Going on to the iconic messages in the advertisement, we observe that the locally produced, traditional Cypriot products have been carefully arranged on the screen of an old television with which they have common connotations: old = traditional = quality product that benefits the local economy. Interestingly, the company logos are placed directly below. Maingueneau (2007: 190-191) informs us that brands serve a *testimonial function* in communication texts, since it is the creator of the product that bears the responsibility for its quality. However, he also observes that brands are increasingly distancing themselves from—in our opinion, rejecting—identification with the product’s manufacturer, and in the process becoming the generator of a discourse that aims to invest in products with particular values. In the case discussed, the manufacturer’s identity and the particular values coincide with each other, which is why the iconic message and its logo are positioned so close together in the advertisement. Local beverages and dishes thus find themselves in the limelight once again: *zivania* (Cyprus’ traditional grape marc spirit), coffee, country-style sausages, *paphitikes pisses* (chewing gum produced in Paphos) and *loukoumia* (traditional sweet delights) are all signs of Cypriotness that are easily decoded and are synonymous with guaranteed high quality.

The fourth advertisement (figure 3-21) differs from the previous three in that the old and the new meet at the iconic level. Thus, on the one hand, we have the main verbal message “Οϊ! Εν κάμνει φούσκα!” (No! You can’t blow bubbles with it!), which is in the GCD and in bold red letters, and, furthermore, is accompanied by the advertised gum, promoted as a traditional product with a protected designation of origin; while, on the other hand, the young lady portrayed as saying the utterance is quite modern. The message the advertiser is trying to convey is that a traditional product, such as *paphitikes pisses*, is a timeless product and can be adopted by the new generation.



Fig. 3-21: Chewing gum advertisement

Note also that the advertisers have put to good use an element connoting young people's preferences: the *speech bubble*. Eco (1994: 193) states that if it is drawn in the conventional manner and ends in a tail pointing to the speaker's face, it signifies speech. In this case, part of the speech, the utterance "φούσκα" (bubble), is intersemiotically translated by the conventionally drawn speech bubble. This redundancy isn't accidental, given that the speech bubble serves as a sign with two signifieds: the bubble you blow with gum (which is quite popular among young people) and the speech bubble used in comics (also loved by young people).

### Sociolinguistic and typographical observations

The GCD advertisements we studied, associate certain locally produced goods with Cypriot identity, a fact which brings to mind Dyer's (1982: 185) observation that "[a]dvertising helps us to make sense of things [...]. We come to think that consuming commodities will give us our identities". To lay emphasis on this identity, use is made of what could be classified as *emotional-suggestive* ads, "[...] in that they attempt to persuade the public by evoking (positive) feelings" (Van Gijssel, Speelman, and Geeraerts, 2008: 210) and, also, in our view, positive connotations.

Sociolinguistically speaking, the fact that the GCD has been chosen for advertising messages is a sign that the Cypriot local identity prevails over other identities, that the dialect can be used as a solidarity code and that it is not in danger of suffering a language death. We could even go as far as to say that the tide seems to be turning on the climate of language self-deprecation that the GCD has been under, since, as Terkourafi (2007:83) mentions,

[i]n Cyprus, political and economic developments have led to a newly-found linguistic confidence translating into increased visibility for, and identification with, Cypriot Greek.

However, many more advertisements would have to be studied for us to arrive at safer conclusions. It is certain, however, that the GCD is no longer limited only to radio advertisements, as was the case in the past, according to Pavlou, but has also spread to print advertisements.

The dialect's written rendering in print advertisements is a phenomenon worth studying on its own, since there is no institutionalised and commonly accepted orthographic system in place to prescribe the typographical rendering of the dialect's distinctive sounds. Papapavlou notes that "Greek Cypriot is considered to be a dialect and not a language, mostly for political, rather than linguistic reasons" (Papapavlou, 2011: 107), and since there is no officially stated linguistic policy in Cyprus, but a covert one, as far as the dialect is concerned, there is no official linguistic outline that solves issues relevant to adopting an orthographic system, creating manuals and dictionaries, and in conclusion, its standardisation. (ibid, 44-77). As a result, when it comes to conveying the dialect in writing we see a variety of orthographic conventions (Papadima et al., 2013: 91-92). In the cases analysed in this study, we have observed that the dialect is rendered through the main linguistic system, with orthographic variations, and without using diacritics to make it possible to visualise its distinctive sounds.

In the second advert (figure 3-19), the word "παιθκιά" (children), pronounced "pethkia", is written exactly as it is pronounced in the GCD.

In the third advert (figure 3-20), we observe an orthographic divergence from the MG spelling. Letters of the Greek alphabet are used in combination with the letter iota <i> to render the pronunciation of palato-alveolar fricatives (ʃ, ʒ) and affricates (tʃ, dʒ) found in the GCD (e.g. τσιάττισμα, ψυσσιής, έσσειεις), but without this being consistent with the written system, for example, in the word "τζαι", where the affricate <ɟ> is not rendered graphemically. Moreover, double consonants are indicated visually wherever they are pronounced as such (e.g. τσιάττισμα, εννα).

In the fourth advertisement (figure 3-21), although the dialect is typographically rendered as it is pronounced, we observe that the word "Οι" is written "incorrectly" based on the orthographic rules

of MG<sup>8</sup>, which does not require a diaeresis over the letter iota since the preceding vowel is stressed. For this reason, it should probably have been written as, “Oι”.

The above typographic observations make it clear that if the GCD were to be more widely used in advertising, it would bring to the fore the problem of its written form, which has yet to be resolved.

### In lieu of a conclusion

Use of the GCD in the Greek-Cypriot print advertisements we studied is clearly semiotic in nature and is governed by the redundancy function. Since the written language is a symbolic system governed by iconicity, it essentially relays the connotations already carried by other iconic messages in the advertisement (iconic products). In other words, the GCD is used for ideological reasons, for reasons of identity, since it would be silly to advertise local activities and products using other verbal messages, even if it were in MG, which may be Cyprus’ official language but is not the mother tongue of Greek-Cypriot consumers. The use of any other verbal system would undoubtedly cause semiological confusion, since it would lack any connotations of locality—an apparently exploitable element for the promotion of local industrial products, even in this era of globalisation.

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<sup>8</sup> According to the Modern Greek Grammar book published by OEDB, the Greek organisation responsible for publishing textbooks for schools in Greece and Cyprus, and all Greek schools abroad.



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