The Typographic Rendering of the Local Dialect in Cyprus

Visualizing ideology in a diversified nation

Aspasia Papadima, Cyprus University of Technology, Cyprus, aspasia.papadima@cut.ac.cy

Evripides Zantides, Cyprus University of Technology, Cyprus, evripides.zantides@cut.ac.cy

Abstract: This study aims to highlight the range of typographic possibilities for written communication in a mainly verbal linguistic code, i.e. the Greek-Cypriot dialect (henceforth GCD). A selection of samples based on the findings of our previous extensive research will demonstrate the typographic diversity found across a variety of media, including local literature production, educational textbooks, the written communication of young people, online communication, subtitling, vernacular typography, and commercial signs and advertising. Finally, two new typefaces that include five original characters representing the distinct sounds of GCD will be presented. The typographic design of the proposed new characters has been tested and evaluated through action research by native speakers of GCD. The new typefaces were designed to bridge ideological considerations and contradictions related to politics and national identity, and to ameliorate practical difficulties encountered by Greek Cypriots when writing in their mother tongue.

Key words: Greek-Cypriot dialect, typographic diversity, typographic design, visual graphetics, language ideology.

1 Introduction

Cyprus is a diverse nation with a long history and rich culture. Because of its geopolitical position, it has been a highly attractive target for powerful empires and kingdoms since antiquity. Successive occupations by different nations formed its complex character, which is manifested nowadays in all aspects of Cypriot social and cultural activity. Cyprus is

home to four major ethnic groups: Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots, Armenians and Maronites. Moreover, according to a recent government programme, in recent years, the multicultural nature of the island has been enriched by a. an increased influx of migrants to meet labour needs, and b. greater investor migration and more citizens-by-investment.

Linguistically, Cyprus is home to two varieties of Greek, Greek-Cypriot (or GCD), the spoken dialect, and Standard Modern Greek (SMG or Koiné), which is used in official state communication. In additional to Greek, Armenian, Cypriot-Arabic and Turkish-Cypriot are also spoken on the island. For Greek speakers, a nuanced social code governs the choice to use one variety of Greek over the other in social situations. This choice is determined both by the situation and the speaker's social status (Contossopoulos, 2000). The gulf between the two is often so wide that SMG speakers can't understand spoken GCD (Terkourafi, 2007: 61). While GCD is the everyday language, as a written dialect it appears in literature, both in older books and contemporary literary production, as well as in folk parodies and on social media applications like Facebook and Twitter. SMG, on the other hand, is the official language of communication and is used in schools, courts, mass media and official texts.

2 Language, Typography, Ideology, Identity

The idea of shared common languages has traditionally been an important element in defining nations. Anderson (1983) argues that when people share common interests and beliefs, they develop a sense of belonging within an "imagined community" where intimate relationships might be absent, but a feeling of a collectively constructed nation persists. It is through language that the citizens of a state share information with other citizens, and inevitably this communication of shared knowledge is ideologically determined by social and political motives.

As Halliday (1978) shows, language has a semiotic dimension that shapes our identities, ideologies and experiences. Orthographies, as visual representations of language, "are constructed as symbols of identity for groups delineated by language, culture, country of origin, and religion" (Eira, 1998: 172). Language use in Cyprus revolves around the poles of Standard Greek, or SMG, and Non-Standard Greek, or GCD, each pole representing a distinct ideology (Milroy, 200), with Hellenocentrism on the political right and Cyprocentrism on the left (Stevens et al, 2014). We can also understand these two poles as the "Greekness" or "non-Greekness" of Cyprus, respectively. This politically and historically loaded dichotomy informs the collective identity of all Cypriots (Papadima &

Photiades, submitted for publication 2016), especially when the choice of linguistic code is conscious and targeted, for example, the use of GCD by politicians in public discourse.

3 Greek-Cypriot dialect in written discourse

3.1 Typographic manifestations of GCD

GCD first appears in the historical record in the 14th century in "The Assizes", a Frankish law code that was officially translated into the Cypriot-Greek dialect (Coutsougera and Georgiou, 2006). Since the 19th century, lexicographers and linguists have struggled to represent typographically the special characters and symbols native to GCD.

Nowadays, we come across GCD in written form more often than in the past, as it seems that there is an increasing interest in writing in the dialect. We encounter GCD in local literary production, for example, in local textbooks at all levels of education, in the written communication of young people, which, however, varies according to whom they address (i.e. friends or older people), in online communication, subtitling, vernacular typography, and in commercial signs and advertising (fig. 1).
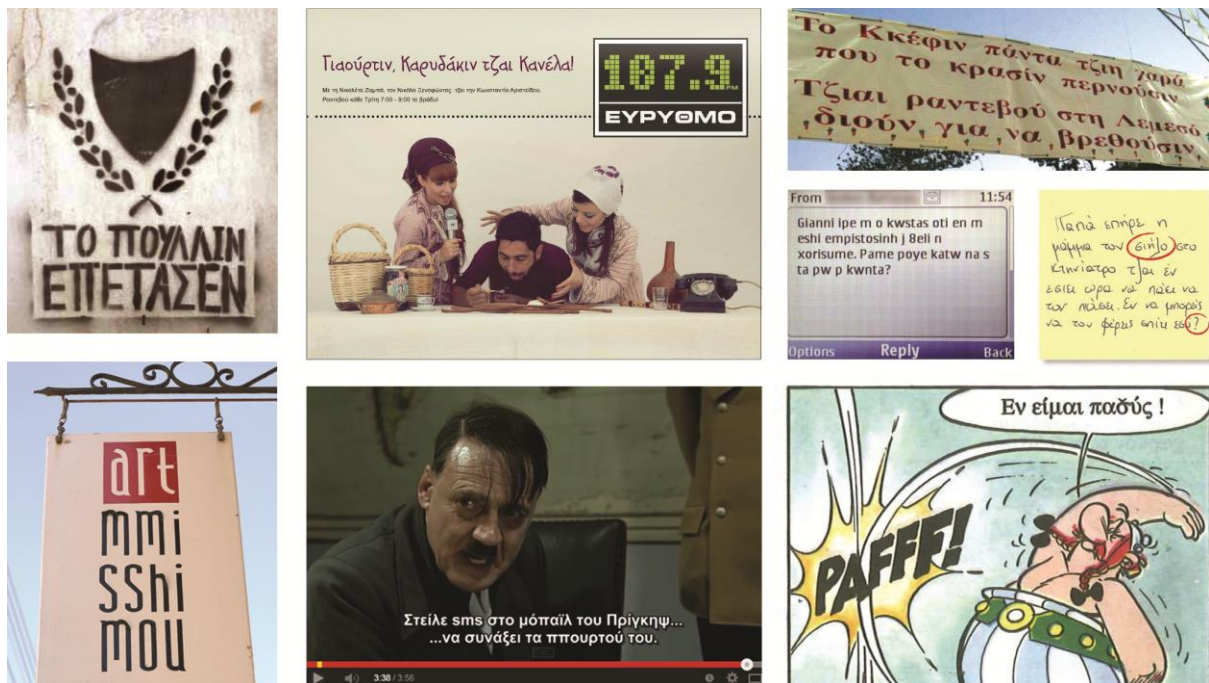

Figure 1 Samples of various typographic manifestations of GCD.
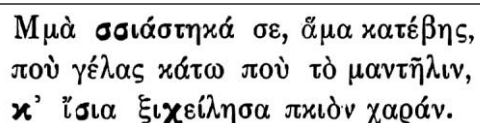
3.2 Typographic diversity

Although SMG orthography is adopted when writing GCD, this presents problems for GCD speakers, who can't reproduce specific dialectical sounds unique to GCD. The issue is further complicated by ideological and political considerations, which have traditionally proved to be a stumbling block to creating and adopting a complete, universally accepted

orthographic system (Papavlou, 2005). The result has been a hodgepodge of writing systems constructed by non-professionals that have only led to further linguistic confusion. Other problems have been missing Unicode characters to represent GCD phonetic peculiarities and a GCD font designed according to the principles of microtypography, both of which have led publishers of GCD texts to experiment unsuccessfully on their own with substandard results.

In a previous study attempting to document the most popular systems used to represent GCD (Papadima et al., 2014), typographic conventions were grouped into separate categories according to the system and typographic principles used. Typographic problems that arise within each convention have been thoroughly studied (Papadima & Kyriacou, submitted for publication 2016). In brief, the most popular typographic conventions used are the following:

a. Greek characters in bold

This convention, which is not currently in use, retains the historical orthography of SMG by using letters from the Greek alphabet. It uses bold lettering for Greek phonemes in order to demonstrate modified pronunciation for GCD's distinct sounds (fig. 2). However, bold letters create excessive focal points within the text, thus impairing consistency and a seamless reading experience.

Figure 2 Poem excerpt by Pavlos Liasides (Liasides, 1933).

b. Greek characters combined with diacritical marks

The letters of the Greek alphabet are used in combination with various diacritical marks such as brèves, apostrophes, acutes, hyphens or hatcheks (fig. 3). Diacritical marks are placed above or below characters to represent the distinct dialectical sounds. The choice of diacritical mark varies according to the preference of the author or the editor of the text.

Visual complications arise when diacritics are not positioned in their proper places or they exceed the height of the ascenders or the descenders of consonants. This results in "congestion on the vertical axis of the text" (Papadima & Kyriacou, submitted for publication 2016), which requires loose leading between text lines, thus disrupting textual homogeneity.
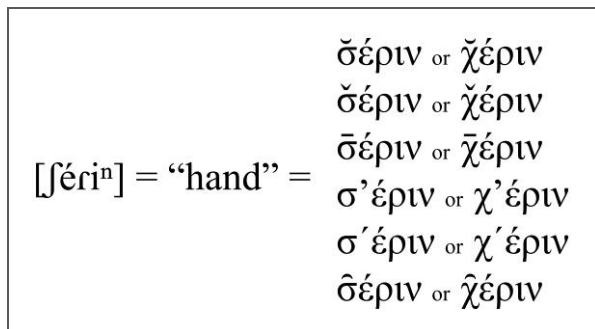
$$[\int\text{\'e}\Gamma i^n] = \text{``hand''} =$$ ŏέριν or χ̆έριν / ŏέριν or χ̆έριν / σ̄έριν or χ̄έριν / σ'έριν or χ'έριν / σ΄έριν or χ΄έριν / σ̂έριν or χ̂έριν

Figure 3 Word samples with diacritical marks placed above characters of the Greek alphabet to represent the distinct dialectical sound [ʃ].

c. Greek consonants followed by the Greek letter <ι> /i/

For GCD speakers, <ι> /i/ represents the pronunciation of alveo-palatal phonemes (Arvaniti, 2010) (fig. 4). This convention is recognized as the most simple and user-friendly. For this reason, it is used in primary education textbooks. Besides being easy to use, it also saves typesetters time because no additional symbols are needed. Despite these advantages, however, this system generates peculiar orthographic results.
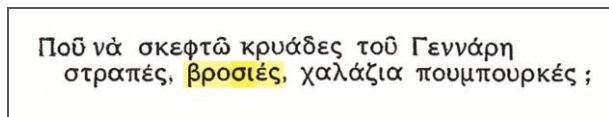

Figure 4 Poem excerpt by Vasos Christoforou Germasoitis (Germasoitis, 1946). [ʃ] is visually represented with the Greek consonant <σ> /s/ followed by the Greek vowel <ι> /i/.

d. Greek words expressed partially with Latin characters

Letters of the Latin alphabet 'intrude' into Greek words in order to render visually the distinct sounds of GCD (fig. 5). Apart from the awkward texts created, this convention has an ideological component related to the hegemonic role of the English language and its influence on GCD. However, it seems to be a common practice in online communication, where the use of "Greeklish"[1] is also widespread.

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[1] "Greeklish, a portmanteau of the words Greek and English, also known as Grenglish, Latinoellinika/Λατινοελληνικά or ASCII Greek, is the Greek language written using the Latin alphabet." Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greeklish on 12 December, 2016.
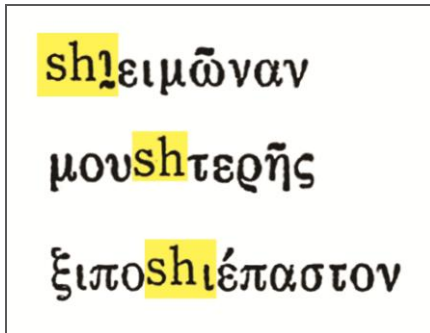
Figure 5 Sample words from Liasidis' poetic collection (Liasidis, 1937). In this edition, we come across various combinations with Latin characters to visually represent the dialectical sound [ʃ].

3.3 Ortho-/typographic choices

Orthographic and, by extension, typographic choices for the visual representation of GCD depend on a number of sociocultural factors tied to ideology and collective identity, such as the nature of the script used and its degree of formality; the ideological/political orientation of the author/editor; the age of the author; the education level of the author; the age of the recipient of the message/script, or the target audience in general; personal preference; the writing space in which GCD is encountered, i.e. the device or medium used. (Papadima & Photiades, 2016; Papadima, Ayiomamitou, Kyriacou, 2014). An additional yet equally significant factor in the typographic representation of GCD is the principle of least effort, which applies to the typing of texts of a non-standardized linguistic code that has neither set orthography nor fixed tools, i.e. a GCD keyboard, comprehensive and well-designed fonts, Unicode characters, etc.

4 One typographic proposal; two new typefaces for GCD; a single identity

Summing up, ideological and socio-cultural factors certainly influence the writing system a language community adopts (Garvin, 1954). This is because written characters don't exist in a vacuum, but are value-laden and culture-specific symbols (Sebba, 1998). GCD is no different, so naturally the choice of writing system is in some sense an identity issue and must take into consideration Cyprus's political, national and religious climate (Georgiou, 2010).

Based on the findings of our previous research into the typographic representation of GCD and the preferences and attitudes of Greek-Cypriot users, the design of the new characters took the following criteria into consideration: a. exclusive use of characters from the Greek alphabet; b. the likely combination of Greek characters and the letter /i/ <ι> to render distinctly Greek-Cypriot sounds; c. simplicity and readability (Sebba, 2007); d. design and typography factors that affect user experience, such as character

recognition, design consistency and cohesion, text legibility, user-friendliness and design flow; e. typographic principles to ensure an unobtrusive reading experience on the visual level as well as in terms of the unity, rhythm and flow of the text.

Taking all of these criteria into consideration, we developed a new diacritical symbol for consonants that would represent uniquely Greek-Cypriot diacritical sounds. We called the new diacritical mark "διαλεκτικό" [ðialektiko] from the Greek word for "dialectical". This new diacritic functions as a diacritic for existing Greek characters, while blending seamlessly with the new characters. The result is a typographic system that preserves design cohesion while maintaining character recognition (fig. 6).

We can see traces of the Greek letter yiota /i/ <ι> in the new diacritic. This accommodates the preferences of Greek-Cypriot dialect users and may bring to mind the *isubscriptum,* a diacritic used in Ancient Greek, thus suggesting the continuity of the Greek language and ensuring the "Greekness" of the new characters.

phoneme	new grapheme	based on the grapheme of the Greek alphabet	word example in GCD	pronunciation	transl. in SMG	transl. in English
[ʃ]	σ̣ | ς̣	σ | ς	σ̣έριν | ιμίς̣	ʃérin | imíʃ	χέρι | τάχα	hand | supposedly
[ʒ]	ζ̣	ζ	ζ̣ω	ʒːo	ζω	live (v.)
[kʃ]	ξ̣	ξ	ξ̣ουρίζω	kʃuríːo	ξυρίζω	shave (v.)
[pʃ]	ψ̣	ψ	αψ̣ουρίζουμαι	apʃuríːume	φταρνίζομαι	sneeze (v.)
[ʧ]	τσ̣	τσ	κότσ̣ινος	kóʧʰːinos	κόκκινος	red
[dʒ]	τζ̣	τζ	καντζ̣έλλιν	kandʒél:in	καγκελόπορτα	gate

Figure.6 Suggested graphemes introducing "dialektiko" and their use in GCD (Papadima, submitted for publication 2016)

As can be seen, the diacritic "dialektiko" affects neither the negative space of the letters, namely their counters, nor the negative space between the letters. As a result, it doesn't alter letter spacing or leading or interfere with the density of the text. Moreover, because of its placement below the characters <σ>, <ς>, <ζ>, <ξ> and <ψ>, it modifies the descenders of the letters minimally and so fits within the baseline and the descender line of the letters.

This typographic proposal has been tested in two rounds of action research evaluation and "was characterized as 'easily used', 'functional' [and] 'easily learnt.'" (Papadima, submitted for publication 2016). Based on feedback from the evaluation process, the necessary design corrections were made. Specifically, we decided to introduce the diacritic "dialektiko" into two existing open source fonts, the sans-serif font Carlito (renamed "Carlito Enalea") and the serif font GFS Didot (renamed "GFS Didot Enalea"[2]) (fig. 7). We based our choice of these specific fonts on the simplicity, clarity and neutrality of their typographic design, as well as on the existing variations (i.e. normal, bold, italic, bold italic), so as to accommodate a wide range of typographic needs. The Enalea characters are alternate characters. If users want to revert to the normal characters, special coding allows them to do that quickly and easily with no text distortion. Applications like Microsoft Word and Adobe InDesign (2008 and later) support Enalea's special characters through Open Type Feature coding. FontLab Studio 5.1.4 designed and produced the font file.

GCD phoneme	GFS Didot Enalea		Carlito Enalea	
	new grapheme	original characters	new grapheme	original characters
[ʃ]	σ̣ | ς̣	σ | ς	σ̣ | ς̣	σ | ς
[ʒ]	ζ̣	ζ	ζ̣	ζ
[kʃ]	ξ̣	ξ	ξ̣	ξ
[pʃ]	ψ̣	ψ	ψ̣	ψ
[tʃ]	τσ̣	τσ	τσ̣	τσ
[dʒ]	τζ̣	τζ	τζ̣	τζ

Figure.7 Suggested graphemes introducing "dialektiko" into *GFS Didot Enalea* and *Carlito Enalea*.

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[2] The name "Enalea", which translates into "found in the sea", was chosen to incorporate our geographical location into the concept of the font, since the Language and Graphic Communication Research Lab is based in Limassol, Cyprus, a seaside city. For the alterations made to the original fonts, all necessary permissions have been granted from the corresponding type designers.

The new characters incorporated into Carlito Enalea and GFS Didot Enalea promote "accuracy, simplicity and readability, as basic principles of orthographic design (Sebba, 2007); consistency, cohesion and legibility; ease and design flow of the manuscript; ideal reading conditions based on visual homogeneity, text unity, rhythm and reading flow (Bringhurst, 2005; Noordzij, 2005; Unger, 2007)" (Papadima, submitted for publication 2016), while accommodating the preferences of Greek-Cypriot users as noted in our previous research (fig. 8).
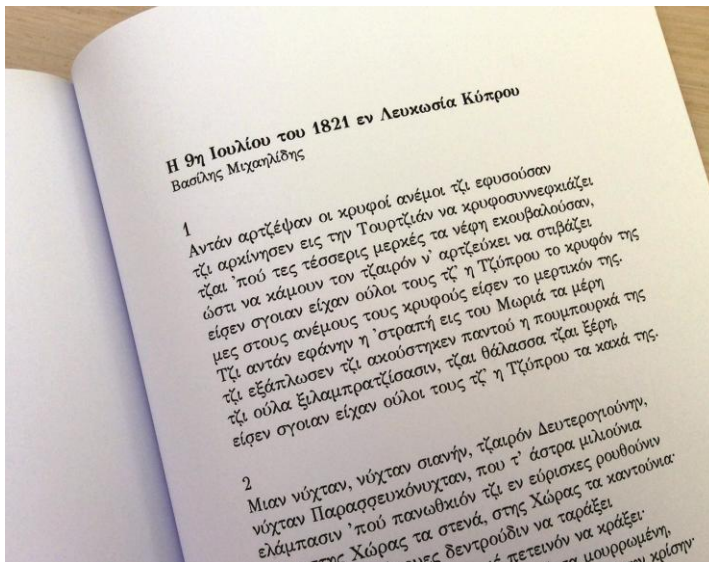

Figure.8 Excerpt from a poem typeset in *GFS Didot Enalea*

6. Conclusions

Although there is a vast amount of linguistic research on GCD, relevant research related to typography in Cyprus was lacking. The Language and Graphic Communication Research Lab (LGCRL) of Cyprus University of Technology has been researching the typography of written GCD since 2010. In collaboration with the Semiotics and Visual Communication Research Lab (SVClab), semiotic and ideological factors affecting the written use of GCD have also been studied.

Banal nationalism as a matter of principles, traditions, habits and beliefs which define national identity through everyday practices (Billig, 1995) filters down into social interactions like talking, reading and sharing information through vernacular language, whether that language is a dialect or not. The distinctive dialectical sounds that differentiate (one of) the official languages of Cyprus, SMG, from the local dialect have historically been predicated on ideological assumptions that reflect social and political positions. Moreover, we can observe that typography has a semiotic power of its own, and accordingly can trigger assumptions about cultural and socio-political values and meanings

(Zantides, 2016). From this perspective, the diacritics placed above or below characters to give visual form to vernacular variations have been studied carefully and explored through the semiotic parameters of graphic design, as suggested by Bertin ([1967] 2010): namely, shape, size, value, texture, colour, orientation and placement.

Proposing targeted typographic design for special characters that represent the distinct sounds of GCD visually is a novelty for Cyprus. It is a controversial and complicated task mainly because of how heavily charged language use is with ideological and political bias. Our key objectives were to resolve typographic issues identified in existing systems; to create an easy and flexible writing system for GCD; to incorporate characters of the Greek alphabet into our system in order to satisfy ideological concerns related to collective and national identity; to ensure consistency of characters, text legibility and smoothness, and, in general an effortless reading experience. The research and design process has been based from top to bottom not only on linguistic foundations, but has also incorporated theories of design, semiotics and design evaluation, taking into consideration the stances, concerns and preferences of GCD users, i.e. native Greek-Cypriot speakers.

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