

Syntactic change in Cypriot Greek: the case of clitic placement

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Contemporary Cypriot Greek (CG) exhibits homogenisation as local CG sub-varieties are undergoing levelling in parallel with the emergence of a CG Koiné (e.g. Tsiplakou, Armostis & Evripidou 2016). CG Koiné appears at first glance to be structurally “mixed”, as it shows significant influence from Standard Modern Greek (SMG) at all levels of linguistic analysis, indicating that the dialect is undergoing change. The current study focuses on clitics and their placement relative to the verb in CG Koiné. According to recent research, spontaneous speech may exhibit exceptional (i.e., SMG-like) proclisis in exclusively CG utterances (where CG normally requires enclisis) (Tsiplakou, Armostis & Evripidou 2016, Leivada, Papadopoulou & Pavlou 2017 and Pappas 2014).

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the processes of language change, and more specifically whether unexpected proclisis is part of the linguistic repertoire of CG speakers and not the result of code-switching between CG and SMG—in other words, whether the bilingual speakers possess one mixed grammar or two competing grammars. To answer these questions, we examined the acceptability of unexpected proclisis in CG with the use of an online questionnaire with 57 participants. The linguistic factors included in the design were the morphosyntax of the verb, the syntactic environment preceding the clitic, the person of the clitic (1st/2nd vs 3rd), and the register (mesolectal vs acrolectal); the sociolinguistic factors were the participants’ gender and age. The main findings were that the acceptability of unexpected proclisis was influenced by register, gender, and age. In particular, younger and female participants were more likely to accept it thereby driving the change. Additionally, participants accepted unexpected proclisis more readily in the acrolectal register than in the mesolectal register. Since unexpected proclisis does occur in both mesolectal and acrolectal contexts, it arguably forms part of the linguistic repertoire of CG speakers and is not the result of code-switching from CG to SMG, but rather functions as style-shifting.

References

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