

Christina A. Angeloussi

BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE LANGUAGE QUESTION IN GREECE UNTIL THE CLOSE OF THE 19th CENTURY

Language is the primary means of communication among people; it is the uniquely human attribute which, more than any other, helps us to learn, think creatively and change our social environment. In this respect people are very different from animals, which without a language of some complexity of their own, are far more at the mercy of their instincts and dependent on their physical environment than man. Indeed, the humanity of man stems largely from the self-regulating system of language. There is a close relationship between language and thought: language is not only the outward manifestation of inner thinking, but itself shapes, makes possible, and even produces certain types of thought¹. It not only helps us to understand why things are as they are, it also enables us to see what might be. An individual's view of reality is closely bound up with language: the language he has acquired will influence how he sees the world, and how he uses the language is closely related to his position in the social structure.

If someone should ask the Greek of today what language means or is, he will be given various answers, e.g. «internal quarrels,» or «I don't want to get involved,» or «innumerable fights,» or «I don't want to know,» etc. For the last two centuries especially, the Greeks have been quarrelling fiercely about their language, about the two forms of Modern Greek.

Diglossia is a phenomenon which, of course, occurs in other countries too². What is strange though with the Greek diglossia is the political overtones and hence the heated controversy which more or less all Greeks have become involved in. The language question until very recently—or maybe still—has been separating Greeks into two camps: those in favour of demotiki and those in favour of katharevousa. Anyone aspiring to become a writer must decide which of the two forms of the language he will use and this choice automatically spells alignment with one camp and opposition to the other.

A striking aspect of the Greek language is the fact that, despite its internal and external historical problems, it has preserved its basic characteristics for a longer period than any other language in the world except Chinese³. Ancient Greek is not as remote and strange to the Greeks of today as Latin is

1. B. L. Whorf: *Language, Thought and Reality*, Selected Writings, M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1965.

2. C. A. Ferguson: «Diglossia», *Word*, Vol. 15, pp. 325-40.

3. R. Browning: *Medieval and Modern Greek*, Hutchinson & Co Ltd, London 1969, p. 9. and G. Thomson: *Ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ Γλῶσσα, ἀρχαία καὶ νέα*, Athens 1964, p. 23.

to a speaker of a Romance language. There have, of course, been changes through the centuries, but these changes are fewer than in other languages over a similar period of time, and the political developments of Hellenism did not cause the break-up of the Greek language. On the contrary, both the language and culture strongly preserved their identity and ethnic characteristics.

The area where the Greek language and literature flourished extended beyond continental Greece to Asia Minor, the Aegean and Ionian islands, Crete, Cyprus, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, North Africa, Italy, the Balkans, and in general wherever Greeks have settled from ancient to modern times.

Greek was the language of the tribes which settled in Greece during the second millennium B.C. These tribes were interrelated, speaking the same tongue if different dialects, and this language was an integral branch of the Indo-European language family.

At one time the various dialects of Ancient Greek had so many common characteristics that it has been theorised that, to begin with, all Greeks spoke the same language, and it was only little by little that this common language was broken down into different regional dialects. The three main dialects were Aeolic, Ionic and Doric, with Attic (the language of the powerful city State of Athens) later developing mainly from Ionic. It was this Attic which gradually spread through the whole of Greece and developed into the new common language⁴.

Already a panhellenic language, Attic was spoken beyond the Greek boundaries during the period of Alexander the Great and became the international language of the age. As a *lingua franca* it went to Egypt and Asia and was used as the official language of Macedonian diplomacy. It was also the vehicle of education, philosophy, poetry, and commerce. However, its dissemination abroad during the Hellenistic period exposed Attic to the influence of the various languages spoken by the peoples the Greeks had conquered or had dealings with. This resulted in a new form of Greek developing in spoken communications, which became known as Koine (=common). The inscriptions of the Alexandrine era were written in Koine, whereas the language of the authors remained close to Attic.

At the beginning, the written and spoken forms of Koine used by all kinds of people were the same. Gradually, however, the political changes in the Mediterranean basin and the Roman domination contributed to a change in Koine, which brought about different forms of the spoken as well as the written language.

4. J. Chadwick: «Prehistory of the Greek Language», *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. 2, Chapter 39, C.U.P., Cambridge 1964. J. Chadwick: «Greek and Pre-Greek», *Philological Society*, 1969, pp. 80-98. G. Thomson: «Ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ Γλῶσσα, ἀρχαία καὶ νέα», *op.cit.*, pp. 69-76. R. Browning: *Medieval and Modern Greek*, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-57.

The upper Greek-speaking classes rather conservatively kept close to Attic. Although even their Koine underwent certain changes, the formal nature of their Classical education kept this to a minimum. The situation was very different for the bulk of the common people, both Greeks and foreigners. They were not exposed to Classical Greek, because education was not for them; they were fully occupied earning a living. In consequence, their spoken Greek was affected by the various foreign languages spoken around them, and eventually this meant difficulties in communication with the upper classes due to language differences. In due course a new Koine developed, endowed with a rather limited vocabulary and a not very complicated structure. The first written evidence of the popular Koine is the translation of the Old Testament by the Seventy Fathers in 250 to 150 B.C. Difference in language became synonymous with difference in social status. With education as privilege of the upper classes, the form of the language used defined the speaker's social class. Given the status symbol of an education in the highly esteemed Classics, the language of the lower classes was inevitably regarded as inferior.

By the time of the early Roman era the linguistic rift had worsened and Greek diglossia had become triglossia: some insisted on writing in the pure Attic of the fifth and fourth centuries, others employed a literary form of the spoken language in their writings, and the common people used their own vernacular. What linguistic form was used depended also on the subject: scientific texts were in Koine, literature (i.e. rhetoric, history, etc.) in Attic, poetry had rules of its own.

The leading defender of the static Archaic language was Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a historian and orator who lived in Rome during the first century A.D. His motto was: «Speak and write like the ancient Athenians». At that time the social classes were widely separated and since the common people, apostrophised as «the mob» by the aristocracy, spoke a language considered as corrupt and vulgar, the upper classes, by adhering to Attic Greek, could demonstrate that they had nothing in common with the «mob» they despised so much.

Nevertheless, the language situation of that period led many of the more realistic, highly-educated people to write in a form of the spoken language which, while it preserved much of the morphology and structure of Attic, was not an artificial construct. In this way a literary tradition of the vernacular gradually established itself, and this was used by Plutarch, Lucian and many other intellectuals of the period. The Atticists were not at all in favour of this development, and the first controversies on the language issue began to appear. Plutarch attacked the Atticists⁵, and so did Lucian in his two dialogues *Λεξιφάνης* and *Ρητόρων διδάσκαλος*.

5. Plutarch: *Περὶ παιδων ἀγωγῆς*, 9, c-e.

With Atticist opposition to the common vernacular used by the liberal intellectuals of the first and second centuries A.D. the language question became a conflict between the upper classes, i.e. between those who wished to speak and write like Plato or Sophocles, and those who favoured the contemporary literary form of the vernacular. The spoken language of the common people played no part in this conflict which remained rather intellectual in nature.

New Testament texts of the time are found in different linguistic forms; and the choice of level was made in accordance with either the audience, or the subject matter, or the writer's competence. Historically, the Gospels are among the first and the most characteristic extant documents which were written in the common language of the people. The Apostles, too, preached in this simple form, wishing to be widely understood. One of the charges levelled against Christianity during the two first centuries A.D. was that its followers were only illiterate and low-class people—the «mob»—a charge which was to recur again in later times.

Although the Old Testament was translated into simple Koine and the Gospels too were written in this form, the Fathers of the Church, for various reasons, still wrote their texts, letters and pronouncements in classicised Greek and in this way contributed to the further development of diglossia, whether deliberately or inadvertently. They used classicised Greek partly because, having received a Classical education, this was the only form of the language they had learnt to write; partly because they wanted to give prestige to Christianity and felt that the popular language was not refined enough for Christian philosophy; and partly also because they wished to be on good terms with the Byzantine Palace and the State, both of which were using classicised Greek.

Since the common people were exposed mainly to the Gospels and other texts of the Apostles, whereas the writings of the Church Fathers were more familiar to the upper classes, it may be said that though the Church Fathers assisted in the development of the Greek diglossia of that time, Christianity itself came to the aid of the simple vernacular. In 529, when Justinian closed all the academies and schools of philosophy in Athens where Classical literature was taught and burned the libraries, Atticism, too, died and the Attic dialect was given a fatal blow. Its place was eventually taken by literary Koine.

We have a certain number of texts of the period 600-1100 which were written in literary Koine and represent a balance between the ideal purist language and the speech of the people. These include chronicles such as the *Πασχαλινόν Χρονικόν*, written shortly after 628, lives of saints etc. In addition, some enlightened members of the ruling class, such as Constantine Porphyrogenitus (912-959) and certain monks, composed some literary texts of intermediate standard. Although the period produced no poetry in

the people's spoken vernacular⁶, we do have some verses in this vernacular with which the people—not always in a friendly way—greeted the Emperor on formal occasions.

One of the special characteristics of the Byzantine era is that it was then that the ideological seeds of the language question were sown. The Palace, the State, as well as the Church in her correspondence, employed a conservative form of classicised Greek (Attic), whereas the people continued to use the vernacular. However, neither Attic nor literary Koine were to last forever. Attic gradually became the vehicle for only a minority of writers, restricted to professional copyists and shunned by creative authors.

From the sixth century onwards the Byzantine Empire began to crumble, and political and economic decadence brought in their wake intellectual decay. This created new conditions for a new split in the popular language, and over some centuries led to the appearance of different dialect forms. With piracy ravaging the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas, the Byzantine Empire after the tenth century lost its centralised political and economic hold, and half-independent small States appeared here and there. The closed-economy system of the time managed to halt commercial exchanges, and the provinces were slowly isolated from one another. The situation became worse from the fifteenth century onwards, when the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 and their dominance in the Balkans made economic conditions in the Mediterranean even worse and sealed off the Balkans from Western Europe. The common Greek vernacular meanwhile was adulterated by the languages of the peoples established in various parts of the Balkans (Turks, Venetians, etc.), broke down structurally, and developed different dialects in geographically separated areas.

No such changes modified the literary language used by the Church, which remained almost unaltered during the above mentioned centuries (the sixth century onwards). Even so it gradually lost its original coherence and became a contrived expedient for written communications during the Byzantine era and later under the Ottoman Empire. Apart from a small number of Byzantine courtiers, and another minority, the Church hierarchy, nobody used the literary language any longer, and only a few expressions from its old richness remained as frozen idioms in the vernacular. This is why, even if the literary language managed to survive in the large commercial centres, it clung on only as an artificial construct and not as the living vernacular of the upper classes.

In any case the Byzantine as well as the Church aristocracy during the ten centuries of the Byzantine State did not form a hereditary social class preserving its old tradition as proof of noble descent. Various generals, most of whom originated from the lower classes, managed to become emperors,

6. The spoken vernacular differed from the literary vernacular.

so that court personnel changed very often, and with them the Patriarchs. Such fluid circumstances were not conducive to providing the literary tradition with a stable social background. Besides, there were only a few writers at the court aside from the Patriarchs, who, of course, wrote in the literary state language they had been taught.

It must be stressed again that the end of the Byzantine Empire and the Turkish period did not bring any radical change in the conditions in which the Greek language was used. The majority of prose works continued to be written in the literary form of Koine and were considered the «serious» literature, whereas the vernacular was used almost exclusively in poetry. It was influenced by various other languages, e.g. in the towns mostly by Turkish, in the agricultural countryside by Slavonic, in the mountain pasturelands by Vlach, and in the Ionian islands by Italian and French.

This, then, was the linguistic situation of the Greeks when they began to rebel against the Turks. As the national consciousness grew deeper late in the eighteenth century, and the desire for liberation from the Turkish yoke came to be the first demand of the Greek people, the idea of a single language started to occupy those who aspired to be the intellectual leaders of the revolution. In Greece and especially in the large Greek centres in Western Europe (Venice, Trieste, etc.), more and more scientific books had meanwhile been published, either translated or written in a Greek which was an amalgam of the literary and the vernacular form.

Set against this historical background, the language question in Greece has ever since been a controversy among Greeks, and has manifested itself at times as a national problem, as a cultural or social, and often even as a political one.

The majority of the conservative class, the Phanariots and the Kotzambasides, for various reasons were against the struggle for liberation and national independence: they were afraid of the consequences of failure; as entrenched conservatives they were suspicious of everything new and radical, including modern science and in general any new ideas likely to upset their feudal society⁷; they did not consider the time ripe as yet for a national renaissance because they believed that a cultural renaissance had to come first, and this cultural renaissance would have to be based on a «regenerated» language. They regarded the vernacular adulterated by Turkish words, stigmatised as the language of enslavement, as inferior and vulgar; it was not a language capable of supporting the nation's renaissance. Ideally, for them⁸, the nation should go back to the pure, true language of its

7. During the Turkish occupation, Greece was under the Kotzambasides feudal system which differed from European feudalism in the same way that British Democracy, for example, differs from American or American from French Democracy.

8. I am speaking about the majority of the Phanariots and the Kotzambasides, but there were exceptions.

ancestors. However, since admittedly this was not easy to put into practice, they adopted another form of the language, that of classicised Greek. This gave birth to a new inclination towards Atticism, a movement very similar to that of the first century. Among the chief proponents of neo-Atticism were Eugenius Voulgaris (1716-1806), Lambros Photiades (1750-1805), Panagiotis Kodrikas (1755-1827)⁹, Neophytos Ducas (1760-1845) and Stephanos Kommitas (1770-1833).

The Greek bourgeoisie at the time eagerly imitated the European bourgeoisie¹⁰, and especially its French *avant-garde*. The Greek bourgeoisie, which had developed very quickly, was avid for education and aspired to become really *bien cultivée, bien instruite*. A systematic effort for the improvement and the perfection of the vernacular to this end was difficult because of adverse historical circumstances, and a compromise was inevitable. The bourgeoisie was faced with two great problems at the time: the liberation of the nation, and the elimination of feudalism. Liberation was the bigger issue of the two and could hardly be handled by the bourgeoisie alone. That was perhaps one of the reasons which made the Greek bourgeoisie of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries compromise in the struggle between the social classes and be revolutionary only on the question of liberation of the nation as a whole.

The leading personality of the bourgeoisie and the chief representative of Greek Enlightenment was Adamantios Korais (1748-1833). He was the father of the middle way in the language question. He did his best to keep close to the vernacular on the one hand, and on the other to «purify» it. He attacked archaism and tried to replace with Greek words the foreign (especially Turkish) elements which had penetrated into the Greek language. While his movement was certainly progressive, it fell short of being radical. His followers were Anthimos Gazis (1758-1828), Neophytos Vamvas (1770-1855), Constantine Koumas (1777-1836), Constantine Economos (1780-1857) and many others later.

The positive side of Korais' movement was that it encouraged people to avoid foreign words, an attitude which assisted the subsequent development of modern Greek. But the extremist adaptation of Korais' principles had its negative effects, too: some of his followers advocated not only the replacement of foreign words with their Greek equivalents, but even tried to abolish and replace words which offended them merely because they were from the popular Greek, with classicised Greek forms: e.g. they promoted *ὁδωρ* instead of *νερό*, *ἀπτος* in place of *ψωμί*, etc. Notwithstanding these

9. Kodrikas started as a proponent of neo-Atticism, but later changed in favour of the popular language because of his personal dislike of Korais.

10. It must be remembered that the great majority of the Greek bourgeoisie resided and operated professionally in the diaspora outside Greece.

zealous aberrations, Korais and his movement did much to facilitate the development of modern Greek; he was the first to strike a blow against archaism and managed to remove at least some of the prejudice against the vernacular language¹¹. From this point of view, he can be said to have paved the way for demoticism.

Aside from these two movements —the conservatives in favour of neo-Atticism and the progressives demanding purification (katharevousa)—there was another, the radical movement in support of the vernacular, the language used by the people and of folk songs¹². The leading advocate of these radical demoticists was Demetrios Katartzis - Fotiades (1730?-1807); his supporters and followers were Gregorios Konstantas (1753-1844), Daniel Philippides (1758-1832), and Regas Ferraïos - Velesinlis (1771-1823), all three from the Pelion peninsula, Athanassios Psalidas (1767-1829), Ioannis Vilaras (1771-1823), Athanassios Christopoulos (1778-1857), the national poet Dionysios Solomos (1798-1857), and many more later.

Regas Velesinlis - Ferraïos, a disciple of Katartzis, very soon realised how important a role language could play in the liberation of the enslaved nation. He translated a short physics manual from German and French into the simple vernacular¹³, and kept urging the intellectual leaders of the Greeks to use the vernacular which was spoken and understood by the people¹⁴. For him language, motherland and freedom were one and the same thing. He fully realised just how vital the language question was, and in the Constitution which he drafted on the basis of the 1793 French Constitution he emphasised the role of equal education for all people, boys and girls, and the need of using the simple vernacular in all official texts¹⁵.

11. Korais himself opposed the prejudice against the vernacular, but his followers later made a 180 degree turn and frequently allied themselves with the neo-Atticists.

12. This radical movement, demoticism, first appeared round the first half of the sixteenth century with the theoretical teaching of language by N. Sophianos, a Corfiote.

13. Regas Velesinlis: «Φυσικῆς Ἀπάνθισμα», A. Daskalakis, *Μελέτα περί Ρήγα Βελεστινλή*, Athens 1964, pp. 339-347.

14. «Ἐν ὧσφ, φίλε μου, ὁ Χασάνης καὶ ὁ Μεχμέτης τυμπανίζουσι διὰ τῆς σιδηρᾶς ράβδου τὴν κεφαλὴν τοῦ Ἑλλήνος, οὗτος οὔτε καιρόν, οὔτε νοῦν ἔχει νὰ διδασθῇ τὴν ἀρχαίαν γλῶσσαν τοῦ ἡ νὰ διορθώσῃ τὴν παρούσαν· ὁθεν δέν δύναται νὰ ἐννοήσῃ τοὺς λαλοῦντας ὑπὲρ τῶν συμφερόντων του, εἰμῇ, ὅταν τῷ λαλῶσιν εἰς τὴν συνήθη αὐτῷ ἐκ βρέφους διάλεκτον· ἀφ' οὗ ὁμως φωτισθῇ διὰ τῆς καθομιλουμένης γλώσσης περί τῶν συμφερόντων του, δρᾷ τὰ ὅπλα καὶ καταδαμάσῃ δι' αὐτῶν τὸν Χασάνην καὶ τὸν Μεχμέτην, τότε ἐλεύθερος ὢν δύναται νὰ μάθῃ νὰ ὁμιλῇ καὶ πρὸς Ὀμήρους καὶ Θουκυδίδας, τότε δέν ἔχει χρειαν πλεόν ἄλλων συμβούλων περί τῆς διαγωγῆς του, τότε μετὰ τὴν πτώσιν τῆς τυραννίας δύναται νὰ καταργήσῃ καὶ τὴν θαρβαρθεϊσάν διάλεκτόν μας». C. Perraios, *Σύντομος Βιογραφία τοῦ Ἀοιδίμου Ρήγα Φερραίου τοῦ Θεπταλοῦ*, Athens 1860, p. 35.

15. Regas Velesinlis: «Νέα πολιτικὴ Διοίκησις τῶν κατοίκων τῆς Ρούμελης, τῆς Μ. Ἀσίας, τῶν Μεσογείων Νήσων καὶ τῆς Βλαχοπογδανίας, ὑπὲρ τῶν νόμων Ἐλευθερία,

Athanassios Christopoulos continued Katartzis' struggle for the vernacular and wrote a grammar and syntax of the living language which were published in book form in 1805¹⁶.

But the real radical in the language question was Vilaras. He was a doctor of medicine and a poet, a widely educated man and a fervent democrat¹⁷. He followed the vocabulary, phonology, morphology and syntax of the living vernacular and made only very few necessary concessions to the literary form. His most important work on language was *Ρομενική γλῶσσα*¹⁸, in which he set out his views concerning Greek orthography.

However, the ideas and opinions of radical bourgeois intellectuals in favour of the popular vernacular were not heeded. The scientific veto of the time was pronounced by Korais. As a result, just as in early Roman times, in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries Greece was split not by diglossia but by triglossia: neo-Atticists, pro-katharevousa purifiers, and early demoticists. With demoticists remaining unheeded, the main struggle was waged between the Atticists and the purifiers, each side more or less representing a social class. On the one hand feudalism and the Church were in favour of classicised Greek, and on the other the bourgeoisie favoured a language compromise¹⁹. For them the language question was only a means, not the goal; the goal was shaking off the Turkish yoke. In other words, the language question in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was not simply a conflict over words or suffixes, but had a definite social background: it was a struggle between the two upper classes: feudalism and the Church hierarchy on the one hand and the bourgeoisie on the other.

When the revolution against the Turks broke out early in the nineteenth century, the controversy over the language issue was put to one side. But hostility between the two parties kept simmering. During the first years of the revolution Korais' followers prevailed: state proclamations were written in a simple literary language. At the same time feudal representatives and especially people from the privileged Phanari district in Constantinople kept on writing in classicised Greek: Iakovos - Rizos Neroulos, Nikolaos Dragoumis, Alexandros - Rizos Rangavis, Fokion Negris and others were not able to write in any form other than the one they had been taught:

Ἰσοτιμία, Ἀδελφότης καὶ τῆς πατρίδος. Α) Τὰ δίκαια τοῦ ἀνθρώπου», Art. 22: «Β) Ἀρχὴ τῆς νομοθετημένης πράξεως καὶ ψυχὴ τῆς διοικήσεως — Περί ἔργων τοῦ Νομοθετικοῦ Σώματος», Art. 53, A. Daskalakis, *op. cit.*, pp. 57, 82, 96-97, 118, 130.

16. «Γλῶσσα Ἑλλήνων Παλαιὰ καὶ Νέα», G. Valetas, Ἀθανάσιος Χριστόπουλος — Ἄπαντα, Athens 1969, pp. 498-531.

17. Vlachogiannis, *Προπύλαια* (1900-1908), pp. 181-187.

18. Corfu, 1814. Some other of his works on language are: *Λογιωτάτος ταξιδιωτῆς, Γραφὴ Ρωμαιοῦ πρὸς Ρωμαιοὺς γιὰ τὴ γλῶσσα τοῦ, Κολοκυθουλῆς*.

19. Of course there were some aristocratic demoticists, and their opposites, some anti-feudal Atticists, but these were a small minority.

classicismised Greek. It is not surprising that the writings in the vernacular appeared hardly anywhere; the living language of the people was not developed enough to go deep into the meaning of the revolution and to express complicated ideas. Anyone determined to use it would have needed to study it intensively and to practise its use. Korais' proposed compromise of the «middle way» held back such an effort.

In consequence, the ordinances and laws of the revolutionary government were written in the purified literary language, and the chief leaders—Kolokotronis, Karaiskakis, Miaoulis, Kanaris, Papaflessas and others—signed them without having completely understood their meaning. Meanwhile, as Makrygiannis' or Kolokotronis' memoirs show quite clearly, the combatants themselves used the popular vernacular. In public gatherings too, the people could not understand what the intellectual speakers were saying, and at times there were misunderstandings which sparked violent quarrels between the audience and the speakers²⁰.

This linguistic confusion irritated many educated people, and even during the difficult years of the War of Independence the language question came to the fore once again. This time it appeared as a national problem. Some of the intellectuals understood very well what a disastrous effect diglossia was having on the insurgent nation. One of them was Spyridon Trikoupi, whose influence encouraged the national poet Dionysios Solomos to write in the current vernacular. It should perhaps be mentioned that Solomos had lived in the Ionian islands, which had for long been under Venetian and in Solomos' own time under British occupation. The foreign rulers were an educated race, and the political and social situation was fairly liberal. Foreign occupiers mixed with Greek inhabitants and freely allowed them to pursue their culture and letters. As a result, the Greek language in the Ionian islands developed rather more smoothly than in the rest of Greece under the Turks, and this in turn meant that archaism did not find many fanatical supporters in the Ionian islands. Years before Solomos, the popular language was used especially in the local folk songs and influenced also the poetry of the region.

Solomos, a fervent romantic and educated Greek, deeply felt the injurious effects of diglossia, and as a great poet became the celebrant of the people's heroism and the despised popular language. In his *Dialogue* he penned a passionate defence of the living language, partly with scientific arguments²¹ and partly with biting sarcasm against the reactionaries. For him, too, the

20. Goudas, *Bioi parállhloi*, Vol. 1, p. 300.

21. «Πρῶτον μὲν, δὲν ἀκουσα ποτὲ πῶς ἡ φτώχεια μᾶς γλώσσας εἶναι ἄρκετὸ δικαιολόγημα γιὰ νὰ τὴν ἀλλάξουν οἱ σπουδαῖοι· δεύτερον δέ, ποῖος ἀποφάσις πῶς εἶναι φτωχὴ;... οἱ σοφοί; Οἱ σοφοὶ δὲν σοῦ φαίνεται πῶς ἡμποροῦν νὰ πάρουν λάθος;» D. Solomos, «Διάλογος», *Ἀπαντα Διονυσίου Σολωμοῦ*, Athens 1921, p. 262.

language issue and the ideal of freedom were inextricably intertwined²².

Solomos' ideas on the Greek language were perfectly correct, but only a handful of people took any notice of them. The influence of the conservative intellectuals was all-pervasive. Directly involved in the revolution, they rose to power because they controlled the State machinery. In any case, the overriding problem of the time was the war of independence, and there were few who understood the importance of a single national language. Meanwhile some people followed Korais' compromise of a middle way, others wrote in classicised Greek, and all of Greece was beset by a kind of a language anarchy.

When the Greek State was established around 1830, its principal administrators had a ready-made language, the purified katharevousa, in which they wrote the new laws and the legislative acts. Kolokotronis and the other war leaders were restricted to matters of military strategy, and merely signed the official papers formulated by the administrators. The State's katharevousa also became the official language of the newly organised schools.

These were the internal factors which gave promotion to the conservative language. But there were also some external factors: while in Europe the Classical revival on the one hand, and romanticism on the other, cultivated the admiration of both ancient Greek culture and its modern Greek inheritors, the German scholar Fallmerayer published his controversial book *Geschichte der Halbinsel Morea während des Mittelalters*, in which he disputed the Hellenic origin of contemporary Greeks. This was an attack on the Greek people's most delicate spot: their patriotic consciousness, their feelings for their national origin. It roused them to a spirited defence, and it was felt that the ultimate proof of their national identity was their language. In consequence, even the compromisers were forced into a more conservative position and classicised Greek became the first demand of the time.

The romantic school of literature in Athens was fanatic in cultivating Classical letters and Atticism. Rangavis, the two Soutsos, Karasoutsas, Paparregopoulos, Paraschos and the rest of the romantics wrote most of their dramas, poems and all literary papers in archaic katharevousa and a few of them in classicised or ancient Greek. Most of the scholarly books also were written in the same form. The impact of Atticism of that period was such that Professor Philippos Ioannou actually translated two demotic folk songs from

22. «Θέλεις νά ὁμιλήσουμε γιά τή γλῶσσα; μήγαρις ἔχω ἄλλο 'ς τό νοῦ μου, πάρεξ ἐλευθερία καί γλῶσσα: Ἐκείνη ἄρχισε νά πατῇ τὰ κεφάλια τὰ τούρκικα, τούτη θέλει πατήση ὀγλήγορα τὰ σοφολογιωτατίστικα, καί ἔπειτα ἀγκαλιασμένες καί οἱ δύο θέλει προχωρήσουν εἰς τό δρόμο τῆς δόξας, χωρίς ποτέ νά γυρίσουν ὀπίσω, ἂν κανένας Σοφολογιώτατος κρώξη ἢ κανένας Τούρκος θαδίζει· γιατί γιά μέ εἶναι ὅμοιοι καί οἱ δύο», *cit.*, p. 250.

modern popular Greek into ancient Greek²³.

After 1860 a movement in favour of demoticism made its appearance and started to grow slowly but surely. The heptanesian school of literature in the Ionian islands, faithful to the instructions and ideas on language of its teacher Solomos, became the main advocate of demoticism. The struggle between the heptanesian school on the one hand and the athenian on the other was so heated that the Heptanesians were accused of illiteracy and ignorance of the Greek language²⁴.

Aristotelis Valaoritis, from the Ionian island of Lefkada, wrote his poems in demotiki. P. Chiotis proved the historical origin of demotiki as a natural result of the evolution of ancient Greek by demonstrating that the living language, the language actually spoken by the people, was the natural successor of ancient Greek²⁵. N. Konemenos attacked the conservatism of the University with powerful arguments and comprehensive examples²⁶. A. Laskaratos and I. Typaldos accepted that the language question was a social rather than a literary matter²⁷. The prestigious influence of the heptanesian school was such that its liberal spirit persuaded a good number of the intellectuals—e.g. Roïdes²⁸, Vernardakis²⁹, Vikelas³⁰ and others—to change their minds in favour of demoticism.

Thus in the young Greek State after 1870, demoticism was gradually gaining ground, and defenders of demotiki came to be found even among educationalists. One of them, K. Xanthopoulos, who later became the director of the Evangeliki School in Smyrni, urged that the living language should be introduced into the schools, and that especially beginners' textbooks should be written in demotiki³¹. Xanthopoulos was not listened to, but he was forerunner of the educational reform of 1917.

23. The songs were «Τοῦ νεκροῦ ἀδερφοῦ» and «Μάνα σου λέω δὲν μπορῶ τοῦς Τούρκους νά δουλεῦω».

24. Letter from Valaoritis to Laskaratos, October 3, 1859, Ἀπαντα Νεοελλήνων Συγγραφέων, Τά Ἀπαντα τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλη Βαλαωρίτη, Vol. 1, Athens 1955, pp. 511-513.

25. P. Chiotis: *Περὶ δημοτικῆς ἐν Ἑλλάδι γλώσσας*, Zakynthos, 1854.

26. N. Konemenos: «Τὸ ζήτημα τῆς γλώσσας» Corfu 1873, and «Καὶ πάλε περὶ γλώσσας», Corfu 1875. G. Valetas, *Κονεμένος Ἀπαντα*, Athens 1965, pp. 33-82 and 83-141.

27. A. Laskaratos: «Περὶ γλώσσας(α)», Ἀπαντα Ἀνδρέα Λασκαράτου, Vol. 3, Athens 1959, pp. 520-526. I. Typaldos: «Ἡ γλώσσα», Ἀπαντα I. Τυπάλδου, Athens 1953, pp. 324-329.

28. Roïdes was a real demoticist. Although he was not able to write in demotiki, he fought for it steadily. The reason he could not write in demotiki was that as a Greek who grew up in Genova, Italy, his first language at school had been Italian, and when he learned to write Greek as a second language, it was katharevousa.

29. Some people believe that Vernardakis was not a true demoticist, and became a fervent advocate of demoticism only because of his hate for Kontos, the great defender of archaism. (K. Palamas: «Βερναρδάκης», *Ὁ Νουμάς*, 21 Jan. 1907, p. 1).

30. D. Vikelas: «Φιλολογικὲς ἐξομολογήσεις», *Ἡ ζωὴ μου*, Athens 1908.

31. G. Kordatos: «Δύο ξεχασμένοι δημοτικιστὲς», *Νέα Ἑστία* 1929, pp. 788-91.



It is worth mentioning here that at the end of the nineteenth century the language question started to become a factor in politics too. The Greek politician Spiliotakis, for instance, understood that it was impossible to spread his political beliefs and ideas among the people without using the people's language³².

During that period there were a lot of political and social changes in Greece. The *Megali Idea*, the hope of incorporating formerly Greek lands in Asia Minor and elsewhere into the Greek motherland, was an expression of Greek nationalism of the time. Meanwhile, however, the nationalism of the other Balkan countries had developed also, and Greece's political interests conflicted with the interests of other Balkan States and vice versa. Harilaos Trikoupi (1832-1896), the greatest Greek politician of the nineteenth century, tried hard to bring about the modernisation of the young Greek State. He built new roads and the country's first railway, and did all he could to help the newly established Greek industry. But his political opponents, who represented the feudal and very conservative elements of the country, reacted strongly and finally ousted Trikoupi and his party. In this feverish climate of Greek nationalism and the country's political and social changes, the language question took up a prominent place once more.

The dominant class, descendants of the big oligarchic Athenian families, thought that a short time after the institution of education the Greek people would be able to speak like the ancient Greeks. On the other hand, there were also many who believed that it was impossible to go back to the ancient language and that Koraïs' ideas on the subject had been the most correct.

Demoticism meanwhile was gaining more and more ground, especially among the intellectuals, while the University in Athens had become the castle of Atticism. Professor Kontos, a fine philologist but highly conservative, disagreed with Vernardakis, one of those who had been converted to demoticism by the heptanesian school. The two men exchanged quite a number of books, articles, and essays in their controversy, which became steadily more embittered. The conflict spread to their respective followers, and the University of Athens School of Philosophy divided into two parties: the archaists with Kontos as their leader, and the demoticists with Vernardakis at their head. When Professor Hatzidakis tried to provide a balance half-way between the two parties, he merely succeeded in creating a third party. After starting out in favour of demoticism he settled for the middle way: *katharevousa*. The heat from the language debate was felt beyond the University boundaries, and journalist Vlassis Gavrielides³³ finally took it from the University into the streets and coffee shops of Athens³⁴.

32. I. Spiliotakis: *Εὔπνα Ρωμιέ*, Athens 1881.

33. G. Kordatos: *Ἡ ἱστορία τοῦ γλωσσικοῦ μας ζητήματος*, Athens 1973, pp. 135-36.

34. The Greek coffee shops were a kind of successor to the ancient Greek agora as the place for public gatherings and discussions, mainly on politics but on other subjects too.

Into this atmosphere of national, political, and social changes and intellectual conflicts in Greece stepped Giannis Psicharis. He was a philologist of distinction and Professor of Modern Greek in Paris, imbued with a consciousness of his mission as the Messiah of the cultural renaissance of the newly formed Greek State³⁵. He entered the struggle for the Greek language with his *Essais de Grammaire* in 1886. In this work he expressed his conviction of being unique as the «only servant devoted to the interests of Greece»³⁶. In 1888 he published his *Voyage*, which came to be the Gospel of demoticism. *Tó ταξίδι μου* (=my voyage) is one of the most important milestones in the history of the language question in Greece.

What made Psicharis' book so controversial was the fact that it preached the virtues of demoticism. He was an upper-class royalist³⁷, and demoticism was not acceptable to his social peers. The majority of the bourgeoisie was in favour of katharevousa, either simple or atticised, and there even were some who preferred Atticism. Psicharis, therefore, was in rank rebellion against his own class, especially in his *Voyage* but with other writings as well. However, he rebelled only culturally, and socially remained a fervent royalist to the end of his life.

His stand in favour of demoticism was a consequence of his strong nationalism. He believed in the *Megali Idea*, and felt that only through demotiki could the nation improve and Greece expand its borders³⁸. He felt strongly that demotiki, the spoken language of the people, should be used in both the schools as well as in journalism. While his ideas on the language question were highly laudable, his nationalism was purely utopian. Demotiki in schools and in the newspapers was hardly the means for Greece to extend its borders. Nevertheless, the important point about Psicharis is that he was the first to strike a blow at the concept of katharevousa, and neither could he accept Koraïs' half-measures. He felt it was not worthy of a regenerated nation to solve such a problem by means of a compromise whatever it might be³⁹.

Psicharis and Koraïs represented two decisive landmarks in the evolution of the language question in Greece. Both of them in their own time played a very important role: Koraïs, perhaps unwillingly, paved the way towards demoticism with his fight against archaism; Psicharis became the champion *par excellence* of demoticism. As a professor in Paris he could hardly be accused of being illiterate⁴⁰, yet he went against the reactionary beliefs on culture of his own class. It was as a result of Psicharis' campaign that

35. G. Psicharis: *Tó ταξίδι μου*, A. Angelou, Athens 1971, pp. 58-59.

36. J. Psichari: *Essais de Grammaire*, Prologue, pp. XXII (25 January 1885).

37. Newspapers *Πρωία*, 27 Feb. 1927, and *Πολιτεία*, 2 March 1927.

38. G. Psicharis: *Tó ταξίδι μου*, op. cit., Prologue.

39. G. Psicharis: *Tó ταξίδι μου*, op. cit., Chapter KA, «Συμβιβασμός».

40. Many people who spoke up in defence of demotiki had been accused of being «illiterate».

demoticism became a serious problem not only for the liberal bourgeoisie but for the upper classes as well, where little by little it began to gain ground.

There is no belittling or denying the strong effect of Koraïs' and Psicharis' ideas on the Greek language issue, yet even without them modern Greek would finally have triumphed. The motivation for these two men's concern with the language was rooted in their great love for it as a facet of Greek culture, in their strong nationalism⁴¹, and their belief that the nation's advance was intricately linked with the form of the language they felt the people should use. Koraïs was the first to propose that a more systematic research into the history of the Greek language would help. He declared that there was an urgent need for a modern Greek dictionary which should become the first book of the nation, and he kept pointing out that every living language keeps on changing and developing⁴². Psicharis was adamant that a nation must speak and write the language of its people, and for him the people meant ordinary men and women in the streets and in the villages⁴³. Even though Koraïs and Psicharis both advocated prescriptive measures for the language rather than descriptive ones, they shared a firm belief in the natural growth of a language, and were convinced that only if the Greeks discovered the roots of their language again could the nation regain its grandeur. They differed only in their practical approach: Koraïs looked towards the past to find the really pure Greek, whereas Psicharis turned towards the language spoken in the village of the present. While between them they did a great deal to assist the evolution of modern Greek, it is quite obvious that the Greek language has found its own way. In practice it sometimes approaches Koraïs' ideas, sometimes Psicharis'. It has not followed completely the prescriptions of either the one man or the other but, as the living language it was recognised by both of them to be, it has been and is pursuing its own pattern of vital growth.

41. The nationalist aims of the two men were, of course, different due to their different ages: Koraïs looked towards liberation from the Turkish yoke, Psicharis towards the expansion of the Greek borders.

42. A. Koraïs: *Ἱστορία*, Paris 1828-1835 (mainly Vol. 3. Paris 1830).

43. G. Psicharis: *Τό ταξίδι μου*, op. cit.

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SUMMARY

Χρηστίνα Αγγ. Αγγελούση, *Συνοπτικό ιστορικό σχετικά με το γλωσσικό ζήτημα στην Ελλάδα μέχρι τον 19ο αιώνα*

Το γλωσσικό ζήτημα στην Ελλάδα, το οποίο ακόμα χωρίζει τους Έλληνες σε δύο αντιμαχόμενα στρατόπεδα, είναι η κατάληξη του γλωσσικού προβλήματος που παρουσιάστηκε στον Ελλαδικό χώρο την Ελληνιστική περίοδο.

Το πρόβλημα άλλοτε υπήρξε πολιτιστικό, άλλοτε εθνικό και άλλοτε κοινωνικό για να καταστεί τελικά πολιτικό.

Οι ιδεολογικές ρίζες του γλωσσικού ζητήματος όπως εξελίχθηκε στα νεώτερα χρόνια —γλώσσα κρατική και γλώσσα του λαού— βρίσκονται στην Βυζαντινή εποχή.

Ο Κοραΐς και ο Ψυχάρης είναι δύο αποφασιστικά ορόσημα εξίσου σημαντικά στην όλη ιστορία του γλωσσικού ζητήματος στην Ελλάδα. Οι δύο αυτές προσωπικότητες εμφανίζονται ως οι κυριότεροι συντελεστές στην εξέλιξη και διαμόρφωση της Νεοελληνικής γλώσσας.