

# A new sociolinguistic variable in Cypriot Greek

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## 1. Introduction

The object of study in this brief report is the variable pronunciation of the syllable /liV/ in Cypriot Greek, i.e. in words such as /ðuliá/ ‘work’, /maliá/ ‘hair’, etc. As will be seen below, this type of variation has barely been noted in the literature, so it is perhaps appropriate to justify it as an object for variationist study. Tagliamonte (2006) uses the term *super token* to refer to instances in which a single speaker uses two different variants of a variable in the same utterance, because these exemplify the type of variation that is suitable for quantitative analysis. In this corpus, the best example of a super token can be seen in the following excerpt (1), where an educated female speaker in her mid-twenties, who is recounting a recent trip to Sweden, switches between a palatal lateral and a palatal fricative in the middle of a noun phrase:

- (1) iðame            to-ðimarxio        **tim-baja**    **i-paʎa**            i-poli  
see.1PL.PAST DEF-cityhall.DO DEF-old.DO DEF-old.SUBJ DEF-city.SUBJ  
ine                gamlaston  
be.3SG.PRES gamlaston  
‘We saw City Hall, the old, “old city” is “gamlaston” (in Swedish)?’

The earliest mention of this variation comes from Christodoulou (1967), who locates this phenomenon in the cities of Lemesos and Amohostos.<sup>1</sup> More recently, Arvaniti (1999, to appear), also mentions this variation, but according to her it is more characteristic of the region of Larnaca. Newton (1972:24), however, does not mention this type of variation. According to him, [l] is a “voiced alveolar lateral, somewhat palatalized and long before /y/.” Thus, even though this variation has been noted in the literature, not much is known about it. I present here the results of a variationist analysis of the phenomenon, including a detailed description of the possible variants, two of which have not been identified up to this point. The results of the quantitative examination show that the innovative variants are favoured by male speakers and disfavoured by females, while a speaker’s level of education and place of residence are not important factors. In the discussion section, I make a preliminary attempt at explaining this pattern. I suggest that the innovative variants are a supra-regional feature of generalized Cypriot Greek that has covert prestige. At the same time, I highlight some aspects of the pattern that indicate that the meaning of the variable is more complicated, and suggest that further research employing the construct of *indexical field* could further our understanding. Overall, the emergence of this variable is seen as yet another sign of the rising status of Cypriot Greek within its native community.

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## 2. Methodology and Results

The database has been constructed on the basis of conversations, which were recorded during the spring of 2007 by eight participant-interviewers in Cyprus. These research assistants were students at the Department of English Studies at the University of Cyprus in Lefkosia, where I taught as a visiting professor during that period. Thus, I had the opportunity to train them in terms of fieldwork techniques, ethical standards etc. The team members were all native speakers of Cypriot from different areas of the southern part of the island, and were instructed to conduct conversations with family members and close friends.

The interviewers were not told the precise nature of the investigation; they were only told that I wanted to collect a database of vernacular Cypriot. Thus they were not prone to control their pronunciation or that of the participants, except for two instances at the beginning of a conversation where they instructed their mothers to speak Cypriot, instead of the standard.

Table 1. Age, Sex and Area of origin of participants

	12–17		18–35		40+		Totals
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Lefkosia	1	2	3	10	1	0	17
Lemesos	0	0	3	10	0	5	18
Larnaka	0	1	3	4	3	3	14
Kokinohoria	0	2	0	0	0	1	3
Totals	1	5	9	24	4	9	52

The team was able to interview 44 participants, ranging in age from 12 to 80 years old. The interviews were recorded on a Marantz PDM 660, with a Sony ECB omnidirectional lapel microphone. For this analysis, I am able to use data from all 52 speakers, most of whom are female (38). There is a wide range of topics in the corpus, since the interviewers were given free range and actually instructed to follow the interests of their participants, in order to elicit as free-flowing a conversation as possible. Some of the more common topics are relationships between the sexes, football, politics, travel, and school. There are several clues that these conversations are casual in nature. There is much laughter and teasing, interruptions from other members of the family or calls on the cell-phone.

The classification of the participants can be seen in Table 1. The interviewers were able to recruit speakers in four different locations: Lefkosia, which is the capital and is located in the center of the island; Lemesos, the second largest city is located on the coast about 60km southwest of the capital; Larnaka, the third largest city which is also on the coast and 40km south of the capital; and the area of Kokinohoria, which is a collection of towns and villages 40km east of the capital. The participants can be divided into three peer groups (12-17, 18-35, 40 and older), but notice that there is only one male participant for the youngest group. Also as you can see not all ages are represented in every region, since there are only three speakers from the rural area of Kokinohoria, and two of them are teenagers. The best represented regions are Lefkosia and Lemesos.

Altogether, 966 tokens of (liV) were extracted from the database using Praat 5.1.2,

Table 2. The envelope of variation for (liV)

	Tokens	Coding
1. Geminate lateral [ʎ:]	142	0
2. Non-geminate lateral [ʎ]	397	0
3. Affricate [gʝ]	3	1
4. Geminate fricative [j:]	112	1
5. Non-geminate fricative [j]	293	1
6. Glide [j]	19	1

and were analyzed in terms of their pronunciation. According to Arvaniti (to appear), the variation is between the palatal lateral and a long (phonetically geminate) palatal fricative, which is realized as a glide only in weak positions, a finding that is partially confirmed in the present data. Arvaniti also notes that the variant lacks extensive voicing, which is also confirmed in this dataset. However, unlike Arvaniti, and Armosti et al. (2006)—whom she cites—the present data reveal a larger set of variants that may occur in conversational situations, including a non-geminate palatal fricative, and a palatal affricate as detailed in Table 2. Still, the lateral and fricative variants are the most frequently occurring ones. Since GoldVarb cannot execute multinomial analyses, the variants were grouped as 1 and 2 vs. 3, 4, 5, and 6; in other words the analysis was conducted along the contrast lateral (coded as 0) vs. non-lateral (coded as 1). Figures 1 and 2 depict the variants of the lateral and fricative pronunciations respectively. The short lateral in 1a is 0.054 seconds long, while the geminate in 1b is 0.178 seconds long. Similarly, the short fricative in 2a is 0.047 seconds long, while the geminate in 2b is 0.169 seconds long. In Figure 3 we see the other two non-lateral variants; in 3a, there is the characteristic burst of a plosive, while in 3b we see the sloping F2 of a palatal glide.

In addition to not having a truly balanced sample of speakers, another anomaly in the dataset is that the 966 tokens do not reflect many types. As can be seen in Table 3, most tokens are of /ðulia/ followed by /teliono/ (or one of its derivational or inflectional forms). Note also that [teʎ(:)a] or [tej(:)a] only represents the meaning ‘completely’ or ‘totally’. The form that means ‘perfectly’ is always pronounced [telia], i.e. with three syllables.

Table 3. Types and tokens in the dataset

Type	Translation	Tokens
/ðulia/	‘work’	184
/teliono/	‘finish’	145
/telia/	‘completely’	98
/malia/	‘hair’	65
/palio/	‘old’	103
/xilia/	‘thousand’	95
/yialia/	‘glasses’	54
Total		744

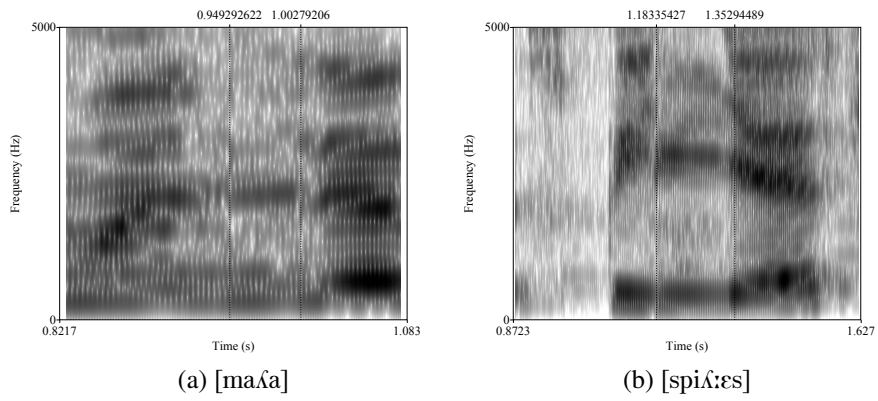


Figure 1. Spectrograms of lateral variants

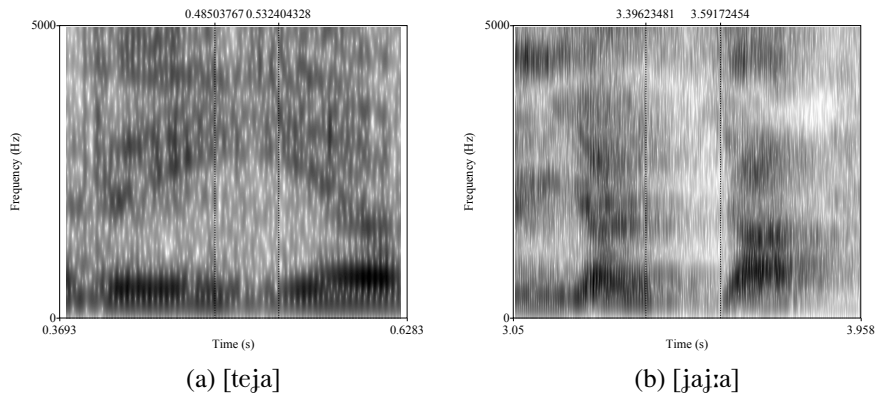


Figure 2. Spectrograms of fricative variants

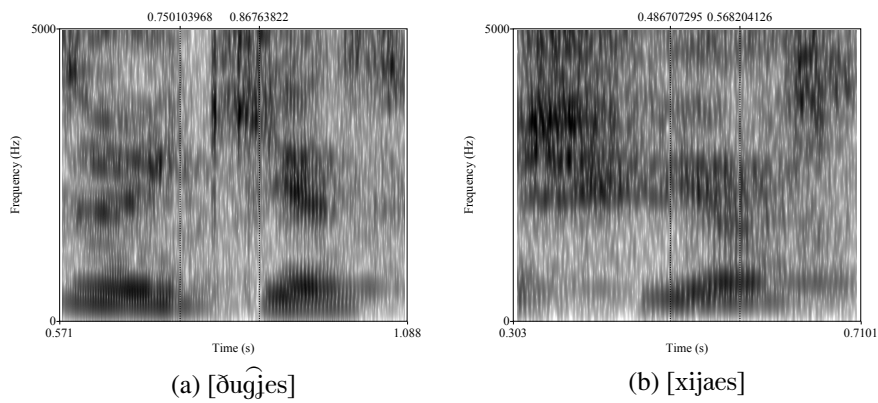


Figure 3. Spectrograms of affricate and glide variants

Despite being less than perfect when compared to variationist standards, the dataset does allow for a meaningful statistical analysis to be conducted. Let's begin by looking at the distribution of the innovative variant (the fricative) according to age. As Figure (4) shows, there is a dramatic increase in the use of this variant for speakers younger than 30.

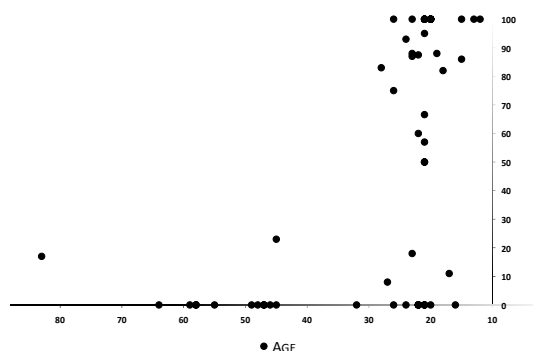


Figure 4. Usage (%) of the innovative (non-lateral) variant by age

The results indicate that we have a change in progress that began sometime in the past 10 to 15 years. Given that only speakers below the age of 30 participate in the change, the more detailed statistical analysis (GoldVarb) focuses on this group only. The following linguistic and non-linguistic factors were tested (Table 4).

Table 4. Set up of the variationist analysis

Linguistic	Non-linguistic
stress	sex
preceding vowel	education
following vowel	region
position in the word	years in Greece

Table (5) shows the results of the Goldvarb analysis. Numbers in angled brackets indicate tokens that had to be excluded. For the group *following vowel*, there were two tokens with /i/, both of which had a palatal fricative. For *preceding vowel* and *position*, there were three tokens with (liV) in word initial position. All three were lateral. Finally, in the group *region* the tokens from Kokinohoria speakers (50) were excluded. Based on the value of *Range*, the results show that in terms of linguistic factors the strongest group is the following vowel, with [a] and [e] favouring the innovative variant while the back vowels do not. Next we have preceding vowel, where [e] and [i] favour the innovative variant while [a] [o] and [u] do not. In terms of stress, [j(:)] is favoured when the syllable is stressed, while in terms of position, it is favoured in word-final position. I would like to emphasize, however, that these results come from a limited number of lexical items, so they may not hold up under more detailed investigation. In terms of non-linguistic factors, we see that speakers who have stayed for a length of time in Greece disfavour the innovative variant, as do female speakers. Male speakers on the other hand favour it. The

education of the speaker and the region that they live in do not have a significant effect. These results are discussed in more depth in the next section.

Table 5. Quantitative analysis results for the use of the innovative variant (non-lateral) of (liV), in Cypriot Greek.

Group	Factor	Weight	%	N
Following Vowel* <2>	a	0.57	58	507
	e	0.57	70	67
	o	0.33	45	107
	u	0.06	5	25
<i>Range</i>		51		
Preceding Vowel** <3>	e	0.71	60	223
	i	0.59	56	81
	u	0.47	67	147
	a	0.33	48	282
	o	0.26	31	22
<i>Range</i>		45		
Stressed Syllable	stressed	0.57	58	489
	unstressed	0.36	51	269
<i>Range</i>		21		
Position*** <3>	final	0.54	58	574
	medial	0.37	48	181
	<i>Range</i>		17	
<u>Non-linguistic factors</u>				
Years in Greece	no time	0.53	59	676
	over a year	0.22	29	82
<i>Range</i>		31		
Sex	male	0.66	67	175
	female	0.44	52	583
<i>Range</i>		22		
Education	advanced	[0.51]	55	560
	basic	[0.45]	58	198
Region**** <50>	Lefkosia	[0.51]	55	263
	Lemesos	[0.49]	54	253
	Larnaka	[0.45]	53	192

### 3. Discussion

First, let us consider the type of sociolinguistic variable that (liV) represents. Within the accepted Labovian paradigm, there are three recognized types of sociolinguistic variables: indicators, markers and stereotypes. There is ample evidence in the conversations that the [ʎ(:)/j(:)] distinction is not treated as a stereotype. For example, in the following exchange (2), the interviewer hears something in her mother's speech that sounds like Standard Greek and so asks her to use Cypriot instead. In response, the mother repeats the phrase /me ta avya/ 'with eggs', pronouncing it [metafka] this time. Notice, however, that she does not change the pronunciation of [avɣɛʎa].

(2) θa tiyaniso avɣɛʎa metavya  
 FUT fry.1SG.PRF asparagus.DO with.the.eggs

kipriaka se parakalo  
 CypriotACC.SG you.DO please.1SG.PRES

metafka  
 with.the.eggs

Mother: 'I will make asparagus with eggs'  
 Daughter: 'Cypriot, please'  
 Mother: 'with eggs'

On the other hand, it cannot be said that this variation is totally below the level of consciousness. Themistocleous (2008), in her dissertation on orthographic conventions for Cypriot online, mentions that <teleia> is spelled <teja>, reflecting a fricative pronunciation. Furthermore, in this dataset there is an instance of a fricative user switching to the palatal lateral in response to the interviewers use of the lateral at the beginning of the conversation in the word /ðulia/ (ex. 3).

(3) sti ðuja mu fonazun me k<sup>h</sup>risti:n  
 at work I.POSS call.PRES.3PL I.DO Christine

sti ðuʎa indalos se lalusi  
 at work how you.DO call.3PL.PRES

sti ðuʎa lalun me k<sup>h</sup>risti:n  
 at work call.PRES.3PL I.DO Christine

Christos:<sup>2</sup> 'At my work they call me Christine (a joke)'  
 Interviewer: 'What do they call you at work?'  
 Christos: 'At work they call me Christine.'

Understanding the degree to which Cypriot speakers are aware of this pattern of variation is important, because this is the key difference between variables that are *indicators* and ones that are *markers*. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998) state that because they operate at a different level of consciousness, markers are affected during style shifting whereas indicators are not. There are not many opportunities to study style shifting in the recorded conversations themselves. However, while wrapping up the project I conducted exit interviews with the student RAs. These are brief conversations approximately 15 minutes long, which are formal in nature. Because of the shorter length they do not include many tokens of the variable. Of the eight RAs four are users of the

<sup>2</sup>This and other speaker names are pseudonyms.

lateral variant and four are users of the fricative. There is only one possible case of style shifting. Interviewer Melpo, who uses the fricative consistently in the conversation with her mother, has three lateral tokens and only one fricative token during the exit interview, indicating, perhaps, that she is aware of the more formal situation and style shifts to match it.

There is then some limited evidence that speakers are aware of the variation, enough to style shift, making (liV) a sociolinguistic marker. It would be appropriate here to remind readers that Eckert (2008:463-464) cautions that the Labovian nomenclature may not always capture the full meaning of a sociolinguistic variable.

The difference between the notion of marker as used in variation studies and the index of Silverstein's treatment is in the ideological embedding of the process by which the link between form and meaning is made and remade . . .

. . . the reconstruals are 'always already immanent' ([Silverstein] 2003: 194) precisely because they take place within a fluid and ever-changing ideological field. The emergence of an *n* + 1st indexical value is the result of an ideological move, a sidestepping within an ideological field. In order to understand the meaning of variation in practice, we need to begin with this ideological field, as the continual reconstrual of the indexical value of a variable creates, in the end, an *indexical field*.

In a complex sociolinguistic environment, such as that of the Cypriot Greek speaking community, where the local variety (Cypriot) coexists not only with its diglossic counterpart (Standard Greek), but also with the language of its colonial past (English), as well as another official language, one that is politically and historically charged (Turkish), it is unlikely that the value of any sociolinguistic variable can be simply defined. Further research, focused on mapping out the indexical field of (liV) is required.

Finally we should consider how the results of this study fit in with what we already know about Cypriot Greek, and particularly what they signify about the current status of the variety. Terkourafi (2005) discusses the emergence of a modern koiné in Cyprus, which has taken hold throughout the island especially after the events of 1974. She reviews the pertinent literature and highlights 10 segmental features that identify this koiné, which I list below.

1. The palatalization of velar consonants before front segments.
2. The retention of long (geminate) consonants.
3. The aspiration of voiceless stops.
4. The retention and expansion of final /n/.
5. The devoicing of intervocalic and word-initial voiced stops.
6. The deletion of intervocalic voiced fricatives.
7. The epenthesis of /ɣ/ in verbs that end in /-evo/.
8. The dissimilation of obstruent + obstruent clusters into fricative + stop.
9. The change of /i/ to [c] after /v/, /ð/, /θ/, /p/, or /f/.
10. The prothesis of /i/ for certain verbs.

The variable under discussion is not included in this list, and as I mentioned in the introduction, Arvaniti (to appear) considers the fricative pronunciation [j(:)] a dialectal (i.e. regional) feature, particularly associated with Larnaka. On the other hand, Christodoulou (1967) claims that it is a



feature of Amohostos and Lemesos. However, in this corpus, [j(:)] is robustly present in the three urban areas of Lefkosia, Lemesos and Larnaka as well as the rural Kokinochoria region, especially among teenaged speakers. On the basis of these findings, I would argue that the innovative pronunciation [j(:)] is not a feature of any local patois, but rather a supra-local feature, a feature of what Terkourafi calls generalized Cypriot Greek (gCG), the modern Cypriot koiné. Whether this feature has always been present in these areas or whether it has been spreading over the past two decades is a question for further research.

According to Terkourafi and others (cf. Terkourafi 2005:335), gCG is based on the regional lect of Mesaoria and has developed through simplification and leveling processes that are the result of contact between the various regional varieties. In addition to this, gCG is also characterized by a few innovative features such as the blended forms such as [xartca] instead of [xarca], ‘papers’ or the use of secondary stress with extrametrical clitics as in [to emvóliòn tu] instead of [to emvólión tu], ‘its vaccine’, leading Terkourafi to remark that

Such a wealth of new productive mechanisms and novel constructions is not what one expects of a retreating variety, and attests to the overall vitality of the Cypriot Greek dialectal continuum, though of course different elements may be falling out of use, as new ones emerge.

The data examined in this study reveal that the variant [j(:)] is an additional innovative feature of gCG. Moreover, it is independently motivated, a true native development within Cypriot Greek, whereas most of the innovative features mentioned by Terkourafi appear to have been influenced by contact with the standard variety. Considered from this perspective, some social aspects of the variation make sense. The results of the variationist analysis (cf. Table 5) showed that it is men who favour the innovative variant, whereas women do not. According to both Trudgil (1974) and Chambers (2003), features with *covert prestige* are more common among males than females as is the case in this study. As a local feature in a diglossic and overall charged sociolinguistic environment, it is more likely for [j(:)] to have covert rather than overt prestige. The covert prestige of this variant would explain the style shifting behaviour I discussed earlier, either as a response to lateral use by the interviewer, as in the case of Christos in example (3), or as a response to a more formal situation as in the case of the participant-interviewer who uses [j(:)] in conversations with friends and family but uses [ʌ(:)] during her exit interview. Finally, if [j(:)] is, indeed, a marker of covert prestige, Cypriot speakers, who have lived in Greece and have been educated there, may consciously avoid it because they are aware of its non-standard status.

On the other hand, the fact that a speaker’s education is not a factor in this pattern is unexpected in this scenario, because covert prestige variants are usually disfavoured by well educated speakers. The complicating factor here may be that the speakers for whom we are making this distinction are quite young in age (early 20s) and so their level of education may not be as important a predictor of linguistic behaviour as social network or personal identity considerations. Perhaps an investigation of the indexical values of this variable, in the spirit of Eckert (2008), would provide a clearer understanding of its meaning. Finally, I would like to suggest that the emergence of this variant can be seen as a linguistic indication of the rising status of gCG as this has been reported on the basis of metalinguistic evidence—cf. Papapavlou (1998), Arvaniti (2002), Tsiplakou (2004). The comparison between the earlier study and the more recent ones indicates that Cypriot speakers are becoming more self-confident, and are more positive towards their native variety. The development of a sociolinguistic marker that carries covert prestige could be interpreted as a sign that gCG is maturing into a robust vernacular and may yet become a standard, given the right political circumstances.

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