Read the Words I Sing: How Cypriot Greek Lyrics Are Rendered in Writing on YouTube

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Abstract

This paper presents a case study of the ways in which Greek Cypriot songwriters render their Cypriot Greek lyrics in writing when they post them on their YouTube channels. Considering that Cypriot Greek has not been codified, and is not taught in schools, the research discusses various online lyric codification devices implemented by the lyricists/songwriters and poses one main question: Are these lyric codification devices to be interpreted socio-politically, as a reappropriation of the cultural heritage that is Cypriot Greek, or are they simply to be seen as a visual presentation of what is meant to be heard in performance, rendered in the idiosyncratic ways in which individuals choose to express themselves?

Keywords: Cypriot Greek; lyrics; language codification; YouTube; popular music

Introduction[2]

In the past two decades, there has been a notable increase in the number of songs released in the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) that have lyrics in Cypriot Greek (CG). This is a significant turn that emphasises local creation, one that comes bottom-up and is in contrast to the norms of songwriting in a country that perennially want(ed) local popular music creations (if acknowledged at all) to be either in Standard Modern Greek (SMG) or in English. Considering that lyrics in SMG also provide an opportunity for musicians to compete in the broader Greek music market and the fact that the English language, often considered as the standard language for popular music, is also the first language for diasporic Greek Cypriots, the choice of CG for lyric-writing creates ample space for discussion.

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This paper presents a case study of Cypriot Greek lyrics as published by the musicians in the description sections of their YouTube music videos. It identifies and discusses four major tendencies in their rendering of Cypriot Greek lyrics in writing: a) implementation of Greeklish (or, Latin-alphabet Greek); b) the use of Greek script for writing Cypriot Greek; c) the use of diacritics; and d) script mixing, including transliterations of Greeklish into the Greek script and the treatment of English words that occasionally appear in Greek Cypriot songs. The paper uses as its primary research material the songs themselves and the lyrics that accompany the YouTube videos. It also refers, where applicable, to various lyricists'/songwriters' codification practices as these were raised during interviews with 10 musicians (nine male, one female, aged 24–45, and active in various music genres) that took place in the larger context of the research programme.

The island's language ideologies, tightly knit as they are with its historico-political context, provide the backdrop against which the creative practices presented and discussed take on significant dimensions.[3] Discussions are centred on the language ideologies extant in the RoC and the different positions ascribed to the official language of the State (SMG) and the everyday language of communication, CG, which has been historically given the status of a dialect of the Greek language. With the proclamation of the RoC as an independent State in 1960, its Constitution set the official languages as Greek and Turkish. Following the division of the island, a result of the Turkish invasion in 1974, and the geographical separation of the two major populations, Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot, the only active official language in the RoC in the past decades has been Greek—specifically, SMG. SMG is used in

[3] On language and relevant ideologies in the Republic of Cyprus, see Vasiliki Georgiou, 'Circularity in the Reproduction of Language Ideology: The case of Greek Cypriot TV Series' in Sally A. Johnson and Tommaso M. Milani (eds), *Language Ideologies and Media Discourse: Texts, Practices, Politics* (London: Continuum, 2010) 101; Vasiliki Georgiou, 'Intended and Unintended Effects of Language Planning: Insights from an Orthography Debate in Cyprus' (2011) 10(2) *Language Policy* 159; Xenia Hadjioannou, Stavroula Tsiplakou, & Matthias Kappler, 'Language Policy and Language Planning in Cyprus' (2011) 12(4) *Current Issues in Language Planning* 1; Yiannis Papadakis, 'Linguistic Varieties and Social Practices in Cyprus' ('Γλωσσικά Ιδιώματα και Κοινωνικές Πρακτικές στην Κύπρο') in Dimitra Gefou-Madianou (ed.) *Self and 'Other': Conceptualizations, Identities and Practices in Greece and Cyprus* (*Εαυτός και 'Άλλος': Εννοιολογήσεις Ταυτότητες και Πρακτικές στην Ελλάδα και την Κύπρο*) (Athens: Gutenberg, 2003), 535 (in Greek); Yiannis Papadakis, 'On Linguistic Bea(u)tification and Embarrassment: Linguistic Boundaries in Cyprus' (2003) 18(19) *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 181; Pavlos Pavlou, 'Greek Dialect Use in the Mass Media in Cyprus' (2006) 2004(168) *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 101; and Marina Terkourafi, 'Perceptions of Difference in the Greek Sphere: The Case of Cyprus' (2007) 8(1) *Journal of Greek Linguistics* 60.

all kinds of formal communication, including press and media, official services and courts, places from which CG, with very few exceptions, is excluded. SMG is also the language that is used by default in education, a context in which the use of CG is largely 'policed'.[4] However, CG, which differs from SMG on many levels,[5] has been for centuries the language variety used daily for any kind of informal communication.[6] Despite its near omnipresence in the everyday —verbal—context of the RoC, the use of CG in 'non-appropriate' contexts (that is, contexts that require the usage of SMG) is often downplayed, linked to lower social and educational strata, and becomes associated with the absence of refinement. Nonetheless, in recent decades, the use of CG has transcended the boundaries of oral conversation and solidified its presence in the written form as well. For this, as Themistocleous[7] and Armosti & al.[8] also support, we can look at the rise of the internet, the central role that computer-mediated communication has acquired in daily life, and the proximity of these developments to informal communication and, by extension, to oral speech.

In this linguistic environment, CG is growing in every local creative domain, including literature, theatre, spoken poetry and, most importantly for our purposes, music. Starting from the Greek Cypriot hip-hop scene of the 1990s, CG lyrics have featured in countless songs of various popular music genres, especially ones that represent young people, like rap, rock, metal, and fusion.[9] This is, of course, a process

[4] For a discussion of the treatment of Cypriot Greek in the Greek Cypriot education see Pavlos Pavlou & Andreas Papapavlou, 'Issues of dialect use in education from the Greek Cypriot perspective' (2004) 14(2) *Journal of Applied Linguistics* 243.

[5] Xenia Hadjioannou, Stavroula Tsiplakou & Matthias Kappler, 'Language policy and language planning in Cyprus' (2011) 12(4) *Current Issues in Language Planning* 8.

[6] As a result of various factors, there has been a levelling of the regional variations of Cypriot Greek, and the emergence of a Cypriot Greek variety that is used throughout the RoC, described as Standard Cypriot Greek: see Amalia Arvaniti, 'Linguistic practices in Cyprus and the emergence of Cypriot Standard Greek' (2006) 2 *San Diego Linguistics Papers* 1.

[7] Christiana Themistocleous, 'Written Cypriot Greek in online chat: Usage and attitudes' in Mary Baltazani (ed.) *Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Greek Linguistics* (University of Ioannina, Greece: University of Ioannina, 2009) 473; Christiana Themistocleous, 'Writing in a non-standard Greek variety: Romanized Cypriot Greek in online chat' (2010) 2(2) *Writing Systems Research* 155.

[8] Spyros Armosti & al., 'Addressing Writing System Issues in Dialectical Lexicography: The Case of Cypriot Greek' in Carrie Dyck, Tania Granadillo, Keren Rice & Jorge Emilio Rosés Labrada (eds) *Dialogue on Dialect Standardization* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014) 23.

[9] The use of CG lyrics in local popular music, and specifically in Greek Cypriot hip-hop, has been discussed by Evros Stylianou, 'Keeping it Native (?): The Conflicts and Contradictions of Cypriot Hip Hop' in Marina Terkourafi (ed.), *The Languages of Global Hip Hop* (London: Continuum, 2010), 194; Mike Hajimichael, 'Hip Hop and Cyprus: Language, Motivation, Unity, and Division' in Sina A. Nitzsche and Walter Grunzweig (eds), *Hip-Hop in Europe: Cultural Identities and Transnational Flows*, Vol. 1 (Zürich:

that has been enabled and strengthened by the technological advancements and the digitalisation of the music industry since the beginning of the century,[10] as well as the rise of platforms like YouTube and Bandcamp, which have paved the way for self-released creative output and the ability to bypass gatekeepers like record companies and 'mainstream' media.[11] One of the positive outcomes of these developments has been the democratisation of music-making, and the creative exploration of identities and musical, personal, and collective subjectivities.[12] Cypriot musicians have been using these digital possibilities in creation and distribution, collectively achieving an unprecedented growth in the song output of the country (an estimated 3,500 songs between January 2015 and November 2024 inclusive), with self-releases being a substantial percentage.[13] Following current music-sharing practices, these songs often find their way on content sharing platforms of which YouTube is arguably the most popular. When artists post their songs (as videos) on YouTube, they frequently also post the associated lyrics in the description or the comments section. Considering that CG has not been officially codified, and that Greek Cypriot lyricists/songwriters were never taught how to write in the language variety of their everyday life, their practices of rendering Cypriot Greek lyrics create multiple spaces for discussion.

This paper presents some examples, looking at lyricists'/songwriters' choices on rendering CG lyrics in writing, and ultimately addresses the main question: Are these choices to be interpreted socio-politically, as a reappropriation of the cultural heritage that is the CG language variety, or are they to be seen simply as visual representations of

Lit-Verglag, 2014), 37; and Maria Kouvarou, '(Re)claiming the Public Sphere: Greek Cypriot Dialect Hip-Hop and the Right to Say it in One's Own Language', (2022) 45(2) *Popular Music and Society* 221.

[10] On the digitalisation of the music industry, see Xiaorui Guo, 'The Evolution of the Music Industry in the Digital Age: From Records to Streaming' (2023) 5(10) *Journal of Sociology and Ethnology* 7; Hyojung Sun, *Digital Revolution Tamed: The Case of the Recording Industry* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); David Hesmondhalgh & Leslie M. Meier, 'What the Digitalisation of Music Tells Us about Capitalism, Culture and the Power of the Information Technology Sector' (2017) 21(11) *Information, Communication & Society* 1,555.

[11] Morten Hviid, Sofia Izquierdo Sanchez & Sabine Jacques, 'Digitalisation and Intermediaries in the Music Industry: The Rise of the Entrepreneur?' (2018) 15(2) *Scripted* 242.

[12] Paul Chambers, 'Producing the Self: Digitisation, Music-Making and Subjectivity' (2022) 58(4) *Journal of Sociology* 554. Chambers discusses this in relation to women and non-binary identifying music-makers.

[13] As also shown by the author's current postdoctoral research project 'Tracing the PLAce of Independent Cypriot MUsic in the Radio stations of the Republic of Cyprus: the hegemonic reasons behind a presence/absence (PLAI.I.Mu.R.)', carried out at the Cyprus University of Technology, that required cataloguing music releases in the RoC dating from 1 January 2015.

what is meant to be heard in performance, rendered in the idiosyncratic ways in which individuals choose to express themselves?

Rendering Cypriot Greek Lyrics in Writing

If a song in CG still reaches the country's soundwaves as a peculiarity, uncomfortably negotiating a place among the songs in the expected—and, to a degree, acceptable—languages for lyric writing (SMG and English), it seals this ironic peculiarity in putting down its lyrics on paper or, even better for our purposes, on screen. The close readings of the ways Greek Cypriot lyricists/songwriters render their lyrics in writing sheds further light on the tension between CG's institutional treatment as a dialect (substantiated by the absence of standard codification and its limited inclusion in the educational context) and its ever-growing status as the language variety chosen by numerous local creators as their expressive medium. Armosti & al. emphasise the need to codify CG in terms of script and orthography, not only because of the growing academic interest on the subject, but also because of the 'range of situations wherein writers choose to or must write in Cypriot Greek, and hence are inevitably faced with the quandary of how to write in this non-codified variety'.[14] The case of lyricists/songwriters and their activities on YouTube is an interesting example, as it shows how the void created by the absence of codification and the need to use CG in writing is filled with idiosyncratic and conventional approaches, as well as intentional and unintentional decisions that are also connected to social and technological advancements. It is also linked to computer-mediated communication and the younger generation. The above will be further discussed in the process of exploring the four main styles of rendering CG lyrics in writing on YouTube, as these have been identified during the research: Greeklish, the use of Greek script, the use of diacritics, and script mixing. Relevant excerpts and word examples, as they appear on YouTube, will be used as required.[15]

[14] Armosti & al. (no 8) 23.

[15] Permission was acquired by the content creators to present lyric excerpts as they appear on their YouTube channels. The excerpts or words taken from the lyric sets are typed exactly as found online on the last date of access. The accompanying translations are the author's, unless otherwise indicated.

A. Greeklish (Latin-alphabet Greek)

'Epian mas i krisi re je en vasto mpakkira
Je epesan oulles oi dulies je efkiken i anergia' [Zivanished, 'I Krisi' (Demo)][16]
[Crisis has caught us and I do not hold a cent
And all the jobs have dropped and unemployment has risen]

'Epia mia mera sto xorko, J esinaksa ampeli
j ethkialEksa to kala, nan glijin melin' [Zivanished, 'To vouttiman'][17]
[I went one day to the village, and I collected grape
And I picked it out well, to be sweet like honey]

The above examples are both in Greeklish; for clarity, the term is used here to indicate the practice of codifying (Cypriot) Greek by using the Latin alphabet, following Androutsopoulos' description of Greeklish as the 'representation of the Greek language with the Latin script'.[18] It is understood here as a practice reserved only for the written representation of the linguistic variety and therefore should not be confused with the relevant (and similar) terms Gringlish/Greenglish, which describe the development of new intra-language variations, with loan words,[19] a 'hybrid form of English and Greek',[20] that is a 'pattern of speech' developed by Greeks (and Greek Cypriots) of the diaspora, 'replete with words and phrases from English'.[21]

A first reading of the two excerpts in Greeklish presented above indicates a 'freedom' in the codification of the lyrics, that leans more toward the phonetic representation of the words rather than any orthographical approach. What is interesting and possibly strengthens the idea of 'freedom', is that these two excerpts, albeit from the

[16] Zivanished, 'Zivanished - I Krisi (Demo)' (10 January 2013) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=22l-8ch95fcU accessed 7 April 2023.

[17] Zivanished, 'Zivanished - To Vouttiman' (25 May 2017) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMU-vZuO30u4 accessed 7 April 2023.

[18] Jannis Androutsopoulos, '"Greeklish": Transliteration Practice and Discourse in the Context of Computer-Mediated Digraphia' in Alexandra Georgakopoulou and Michael Silk (eds) *Standard Languages and Language Standards: Greek, Past and Present* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2009) 221.

[19] Pénélope Gardner-Chloros, 'The Sociolinguistics of the Greek-Cypriot Community in London' (1992) 4 *Plurilinguismes. Sociolinguistique du grec et de la Grèce* 112.

[20] Alexandra Dellios, 'A Cultural Conflict? Belonging for Greek Child Migrants in 1960s and 1970s Melbourne' (2013) 84(2) *Victorian Historical Journal* 1, 17.

[21] Chrysie M. Constantakos & John N. Spiridakis, 'Greek in New York' in Ofelia García & Joshua A. Fishman (eds) *The Multilingual Apple: Languages in New York City* (2nd edn., Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002) 143, 151.

same band, present certain words in different ways. Specifically, in the first excerpt we see the word *je* and in the second the single character *j*, both indicating the CG *τζαι* (SMG *και*, English *and*). While *je* is a common way to write *τζαι* in Greeklish, its appearance as *j* suggests the reader would know this variation as well. Although an assumption, it could be the case that the use of *j* is also a remnant of earlier texting conventions that restricted the number of characters that could be typed. According to Androutsopoulos, Greeklish is connected to the Greek-speaking internet from its early days. Although it was initially used due to technical constraints (i.e., the initial absence of the Greek script for computer-mediated communication), Greek-speaking users persisted in its usage in their internet interactions even after the introduction of Greek script for computer-mediated communication (in the 1990s). This, he goes on to add, moves beyond the technical and transpires into a 'symbol of the medium in which it occurs'.[22] The widespread use of Greeklish in recent decades, especially in the realm of digital communication, has transformed it into a sign of modernity and a common communication practice among young people who grew up in the digital age and under the global influence of English as the main language of the internet. Although the popularity of Greeklish has provoked debate as to whether it poses a threat to the Greek language,[23] its use remains associated with values like technological competence, cosmopolitan outlooks, and global orientation.[24] This can be further exemplified by the fact that, apart from technology-mediated communication, other observations of its use include a few books written in Greeklish, the availability of summer schools to learn Greeklish, automated online Greeklish translation and converter tools, as well as its use in advertisements'.[25] As Laghos, Masoura and Skordi have pointed out, the popularity of Greeklish not only had to do with technical limitations, but with the character of Greeklish as a flexible code that makes the content of the message more important than spelling conventions.[26] Returning to the RoC, the use of Greeklish for the comput-

[22] Androutsopoulos (no 18) 221.

[23] Spiros A. Moschonas, '"Language Issues" after the "Language Question": On the Modern Standards of Standard Modern Greek' in Alexandra Georgakopoulou & Michael Silk (eds) *Standard Languages and Language Standards: Greek, Past and Present* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2009) 293.

[24] Andrew Laghos, Athina Skordi & Sophia Masoura, 'The Impact of Social Networking and E-mail on Human Behavior' (2013) 6(3) *Romanian Journal of Human-Computer Interaction* 47; Dimitrios Koutsogiannis & Vassiliki Adampa, 'Girls, Identities and Agency in Adolescents' Digital Literacy Practices' (2012) 3 *Journal of Writing Research* 217; Androutsopoulos (no 18).

[25] Laghos, Skordi & Masoura (no 24) 48.

[26] Andrew Laghos, Sophia Masoura & Athina Skordi, 'Greeklish/Greenglish: The Advent and Popularization of an e-Language through Social Networking, Social Media and Telecommunication Technologies'

er-mediated communication of CG acquires an additional layer of significance due to its capacity to signify sounds that exist in CG and cannot be represented by letters of the Greek script[27]—the letter *j* mentioned above is but one example.

The interplay between 'oral', 'informal', 'computer-mediated' and 'freedom' takes on an interesting dimension in the case of lyric-posting on YouTube, especially in relation to the use of Greeklish. Launched in the USA in 2005, YouTube has become one of the most important media platforms internationally. Its significance and its potential for research has been pointed out by Androutsopoulos and Tereick, who also touch upon the issue of dialect.[28] However, to my knowledge, studies have yet to focus on the language in the description sections of the uploaded videos,[29] although during our research it was the description section that lent itself to revealing observations. Despite being a platform on which creative content is uploaded to be consumed, heard, or viewed, the upload is most often done by the content creators themselves. In this sense, YouTube might be seen as standing at the intersection of social media platforms and publication 'sites', and can be justifiably treated like any other computer-mediated communication, albeit in a more informal manner. This is the case with most of the lyric sets included in this research. At the same time, the nature of lyrics as 'spoken' language, as words to be 'heard', possibly gives the content creators additional freedom when it comes to the codification of their work.

With the absence from the Greek script of certain CG sounds, Greeklish becomes, then, an acceptable (and phonetically appropriate) code in which CG can be rendered in writing. Nonetheless, as seen in the two examples above, its use also shows many inconsistencies and individualised choices of script. Androutsopoulos writes that this is connected to the fact that Greeklish 'is neither acquired through the normative mechanisms of the educational system nor controlled by norm-enforcing authorities'.[30] Seen in relation to CG, a non-codified variety that is not taught at schools, this statement creates an interesting parallel. Considering how the need to write in

(2013) 3(19) *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 160, 165.

[27] Armosti & al. (no 8); Themistocleous, 'Written Cypriot Greek...' (no 7).

[28] Jannis Androutsopoulos & Jana Tereick, 'YouTube: Language and discourse practices in participatory culture' in Alexandra Georgakopoulou & Tereza Spilioti (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Digital Communication* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2015), 354.

[29] There has been, however, extensive study of the comment sections of YouTube videos. For a relevant example, see Unn Røyneland, 'Virtually Norwegian: Negotiating language and identity on YouTube' in Cecelia Cutler & Unn Røyneland (eds) *Multilingual Youth Practices in Computer Mediated Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) 145.

[30] Androutsopoulos (no 18) 229.

CG has itself been associated with the era of the internet and computer-mediated communication, and is emblematic of youth culture, then that it finds its expression through Greeklish (another free-from-enforced-norms code that is tightly connected to the rise of the internet) seems only fitting.

Returning, however, to the issue of lyric-posting, the use of Greeklish is but one of the styles chosen and that, as shown by the research, is not the one preferred by the majority of the lyricists/songwriters. In fact, a hypothesis that came up during the research is that the more the musicians/bands rise in experience, number of releases, and popularity, the more they seem to move away from the use of Greeklish, instead adopting the Greek script for rendering their lyrics in writing.[31] Future research could be useful for testing this assumption and investigating the reasons why this might be the case.

B. Greek Script

‘ΚΑΜΙΑ ΦΟΡΑ ΤΖΑΜΕ ΠΟΥ ΚΑΘΟΥΜΑΙ ΑΠΛΑ ΣΒΗΝΝΩ ΤΖΑΙ ΡΕΜΒΑΖΩ
ΣΑΝ ΤΟ ΒΑΖΟ ΠΟΥ ΕΝ ΠΑΣ’ΤΟ ΠΑΡΑΘΥΡΟ ΤΖΑΙ ΜΟΙΑΖΩ
ΜΕ ΕΝΑ ΠΡΑΜΑ ΑΨΥΧΟ ΜΑ ΜΕΣΑ ΜΟΥ ΧΟΧΛΑΖΩ…
ΓΙΑΤΙ ΕΝ ΜΠΟΡΩ ΑΠΛΑ ΝΑ ΔΕΧΤΩ ΟΤΙ ΤΟΥΣ ΜΟΙΑΖΩ’ [ΙΟΥΛΙΟ, ‘Το βάζο’][32]
[Sometimes there where I sit, I just shut down and daydream
Like a vase that is on the window and I look
Like a soulless thing but within I seethe
Because I just cannot accept that I look like them]

‘Εσύγχισες με κορασιά,
χαρκούμαι εν να πελλάνω
τζι αμάν σε βλέπω στα κρυφά
αρκέφκω τζιαι ξιάννω’ [ΣaiΣ, ‘Επέλλανες με κορασιά’][33]
[You have confused me girl,
I think I will go crazy
And when I see you secretly
I begin to forget]

[31] This is also the case with Zivanished, to which the Greeklish excerpts that we used as examples belong. More recent videos of the band are accompanied with lyrics that are written in Greek script.

[32] Julio Kompoloi, ‘ΙΟΥΛΙΟ - ΤΟ ΒΑΖΟ [Abstract #19]’ (27 February 2019) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppBWCtrporY accessed 8 April 2023.

[33] Savvas Chrysostomou, ‘Επέλλανες με κορασιά – ΣaiΣ’ (5 December 2020) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aye3jlXX1Wk accessed 8 April 2023.

The Greek script is arguably the most commonly used—and most expected—way of rendering CG in writing. With SMG being the official language of the RoC, and the central language of education from the first years of literacy, the Greek script is the one that Greek Cypriots are raised to consider the script of their native language. This applies to orthography as well. As put by Papadima & al., CG orthographic conventions are in their vast majority associated with Greek etymology and orthography, even if its dialectal sounds cannot be rendered sufficiently by the Greek writing system.[34] This has social and ideological extensions, as per Greek Cypriots' attachment to Greece and the language (SMG) as a symbol of national identity.[35] The fact that the SMG and CG language varieties are closely related (despite their significant differences), and CG has been historically considered a dialect of Greek, makes the use of the Greek alphabet to write CG the expected choice. This has been interrupted, as noted above, by computer-mediated communication and its extended use of Greeklish, which relates to the practice of writing in CG. Nonetheless, even in computer-mediated communication, it seems that when CG is used for 'publications' (for example, blogs) rather than synchronous communication, the writers tend to prefer the Greek script.[36]

As in the case of Greeklish, the absence of a standard codification leads to many creative approaches and idiosyncratic choices in rendering CG in writing in the Greek script, including the freedom to use different characters, something evident throughout the research process. To turn to the examples above, the first excerpt makes exclusive use of capital characters, a choice that also minimises the expectation of diacritics or accentuation marks (without, of course, insinuating that this is the lyricists'/songwriters' reason for writing in capital characters). Both excerpts seem to be following SMG orthographical conventions, with the exceptions of words that (do or should) sound particularly CG. These are, in the first example, the word TZAME (SMG *εκεί*, English *there*) that does not have the equivalent word in SMG and the word ΣBHNNΩ (SMG *σβήνω*, English *shut down*), which in SMG is written with one 'N'; the second 'N' is added to indicate the consonant's heavier pronunciation that is normally uttered in CG. In the second example, the orthographical inconsistency is again to do with sound; this time, it seems to be following the melodic utterance of the lyrics as these are sung by the performer. More specifically, we read 'αμάν', where the word should be 'άμαν' (SMG

[34] Aspasia Papadima, Ioli Ayiomamitou & Stelios Kyriacou, 'Typographic Practices and Spelling Convention for the Written Representation of a Non-Standard Dialect: The Case of the Greek-Cypriot Dialect' in Martin Lachout (ed.) *Aktuelle Tendenzen der Sprachwissenschaft* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kova, 2013) 87.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Armostis & al. (no 8) 6.

όταν, English *when*). The issue of orthography in rendering CG in writing has also been raised by Papadima and Kyriacou, who point out that often in the effort to correctly represent the sound of the words, writers of CG make orthographical mistakes, something consistent with many instances that came up during the research.[37]

We also see how CG words that contain sounds that cannot be represented by letters of the Greek alphabet are presented differently. Specifically, the first excerpt has the form 'TZAI' and in the second, 'τζιαι' (SMG: *και*, English: *and*). While neither of these two forms are accurate representations of the sound of the word in CG, they are both used often for writing the word in various media with a credible assumption that any CG speaker would know how they are pronounced. That the words are also heard in the songs posted as videos on YouTube makes the sound accessible to non-CG speakers as well.

In our discussion so far, we have seen how Greeklish and the Greek script are used by the Greek Cypriot lyricists/songwriters to post their lyrics on YouTube. As indicated above, their usage, despite (or because of) coming with certain inconsistencies and limitations, also provides the writers with a certain sense of 'codification freedom'. We now turn our attention to a third style of rendering CG in writing that can be found on YouTube under relevant songs, albeit less often, and that is the use of the Greek script with the addition of diacritics that signify sound specificities.

C. Diacritics

'Στα πισσούρκα ξημουττίζουν
τζ̆αι σε ξ̆υρύσιν
Τες οθόνες σου γυαλλίζουν,
στ' όρομαν σου ξαγρυπνούσιν' [Monsieur Doumani, 'Πισσούριν']38
[They sneak out in the darkness of night
and they scratch you
They polish your screens,
they stay awake in your dream]39

37 Anastasia Papadima & Stelios Kyriacou, 'The Greek Cypriot Dialect in the School Linguistic Handbooks of the Cypriot Education: Orthographical Conventions and Typographical Practices' (Η ελληνική κυπριακή διάλεκτος στα σχολικά γλωσσικά εγχειρίδια της κυπριακής εκπαίδευσης: ορθογραφικές συμβάσεις και τυπογραφικές πρακτικές') in *34 Annual Meeting of the Department of Linguistics* (Thessaloniki: Institute of Modern Greek Studies, 2014) 323.

38 Monsieur Doumani, 'Monsieur Doumani – Pissoúrin (Official Video' (26 May 2021) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-mD6v-cOjk accessed 8 April 2023.

39 Translation taken from the description section of the YouTube video.

'Χοντρούς λαιμούς 'καρκάλησες, αέρηες εζάλισες
μα οι ψῠέ́ς εν μάισσες, σφιχτές, αναγιωτές' [Antonis Antoniou, 'Θρόισμα'][40]
[You tickled fat necks, you dazed the winds
but souls are witches, tight, adopted][41]

As we can see in the two excerpts, diacritics are used above certain letters. Their use is meant to indicate the sounds that do not have phonetic equivalents in SMG. This style of rendering CG in writing is, according to Papadima and Kyriacou, the most prominent in lexicography, grammars, schoolbooks, and literary texts. Nonetheless, as they go on to add, far from being standardised, the style varies according to writer and their approach to it, be it etymological or phonetic.[42]

Although not widespread among the public, nor a writing skill taught at school, we occasionally see lyricists/songwriters use diacritics when writing CG lyrics. Some, including Monsieur Doumani whose lyrics we use here as an example, have the support of editors and specialists in CG, in this case the ethnomusicologist and writer Nicoletta Demetriou. At the same time, lyricists/songwriters also rely on CG literary texts and dictionaries. As one musician told me during interviews held in the wider context of the research project:

> I don't remember now whether the first times that I wrote in CG I looked for the 'correct way', but I remember that I saw the symbols above the consonants and I liked it very much. [...] While searching [for the correct way to write] I discovered that there was not one single correct way so I settled to that beautiful big dictionary of Yiangoullis. And based on that, mostly with the symbols and the double consonants, I tried on my own to find a logic behind that [...] to be as intelligible as possible. Meaning, the reader sees it and is able to recreate it phonetically. (Male, early 30s, translation by the author)

We read in the songwriter's words a developmental attitude that started from a freer approach (not necessarily looking for a 'correct way') and then, through contact with writings that he liked, the turn towards diacritics, which he now refers to as the correct way of writing CG. We see also the acknowledgment that there is no single correct way, and his willingness and dedication to study more (referring to

[40] Ajabumusic, 'Antonis Antoniou – Throisma (Official Video)' (15 August 2022) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q03U63-QBt8 accessed 8 April 2023.

[41] Translation taken from the description section of the YouTube video.

[42] Papadima & Kyriacou (no 38).

Yiangoullis' dictionary). Possibly more importantly, we see how the artist's main concern remains the phonetic representation of the words.

Some musicians have a different stance in relation to diacritics and phonetic representation. Asked how she puts down her words on paper (or on the screen), another songwriter said:

> When I write on paper, if it is 'σιέρι' I will write 'σηιέρι'. It is also hard to read the diacritics, whereas this let's call it 'phonetic representation' somehow makes sense. The other [the diacritics] you must learn to know how it should sound. (Female, mid-30s, translation by the author)

What we can understand by putting the two artists' words side by side is that the absence of codification, the lack of formal knowledge on writing CG, the unavailability in the Greek script of symbols that equate to specific CG sounds, and the evident need to express in CG are parameters that give the users of the language the agency to choose how to render their CG words in writing. The latter example, with its inclusion of the character *h* in the word *σηιέρι*, provides an example of script mixing, which is the focus of our next section.

D. Script Mixing

One of the most interesting observations that came up while studying CG lyrics on YouTube is the mixing of Greek and Latin alphabets for writing CG words. This section is dedicated to some of these instances, focusing on specific words that featured in the research. As can be seen from the first three subcategories, the character 'X' (in Greek *χι*, in English *ex*) holds a central role in script mixing, and calls for further research on its usage in different media.

ΕΣΧΕΙ

The word 'έσχει' (SMG *έχει*, English *has*) in Cypriot Greek is pronounced *eshi*. The sound *sh* [ʃ] does not exist in SMG, nor does the letter combination 'σχ' produce the sound [ʃ]. Nonetheless, we find the combination of the characters 'Σ' and 'X' used often for the representation of the CG sound [ʃ]: e.g., ΕΣΧΕΙ, ΣΧΕΡΙ etc., and this is also the case for many of the lyrics posted on YouTube that this research focusses on. Considering the above discussion in regards to the relationship between written CG, computer-mediated communication, the use of Greeklish, and the younger generation, it is not clear whether the combination of Σ and X for the representation of *sh* as used on YouTube is a transliteration of the Greeklish form 'eshei' into the Greek

script, or stems from the (untaught) convention that, even if phonetically inaccurate, Σ and X can be combined to form a *sh*. This is a convention that seems to be known by musicians themselves and it was touched upon by another musician during the interview process:

> We were never taught CG [...] Your question is very good, but I never gave it much thought. OK, I read CG poetry and so on. And I don't know if it is what I kept from there. For instance, I write 'ΕΣΙΕΙ' and not 'ΕΣΧΕΙ'. If I write it like that, I read it 'Ε Σ Χ Ε Ι' and I don't like it. So I don't know. I think it is what seems right to me...acoustically [...] Basically, if we are to write 'έσιει' correctly, we would have to write *έσηει*. (Male, late 30s, interview, translation by the author)

In the above quotation, there is the acknowledgment of the spelling convention 'ΕΣΧΕΙ', the personal choice of the spelling 'ΕΣΙΕΙ', but also the acceptance of the mixed script *έσηει* (that we also saw above) as the most appropriate phonetic representation of the word. What is also shown clearly by these personal choices, and can be read in the words of all the interview respondents, is that many of the codification choices discussed here are the result of idiosyncratic decisions specific to the person who produces the script.

ENIXEPO

This word formation was only met once during the research, under a YouTube video that uses the capital characters of the Greek script to render CG in writing. 'ENIXEPO' presents a curious case here since, as a letter combination, it can be phonetically read both in Greek and Latin alphabets (although producing different phonetic results [Greek phonetic reading: *enihero* / English phonetic reading: *enixepo*]). At the same time, it does not have a semantic meaning in either of the two scripts. The word here is meant to be read as the CG 'enixero' (SMG: *δεν ξέρω*, English *I don't know*), and it is obvious that, in this case, the Greek letter 'X' (in lower case 'χ') is used in place of the Greek letter 'Ξ' in a clear transfer of Greeklish norms to writing Greek in the Greek script.

Xoro / Xaixouthkia / Exoglasen

Something similar but in reverse might be happening in the cases of the words 'Xoro' (SMG *βλέπω*, English *I see*), 'xaixouthkia' (the word does not have direct translation, but it can be interpreted as 'making fun') and 'Exoglasen' (SMG *έβρασε*, English *it*

has boiled).[43] In all three words, it appears that the Latin letter 'X' is used in place of the Latin letter 'H', that would produce the expected phonetic representation. This could be either indicating the exact opposite situation than the case above (mixing Greeklish and Greek scripts), or it could be pointing to a visual representation of the sound of the Greek 'X', instead of an attempt to represent it phonetically. While the lyricist's/songwriter's intentions are not clear, it could be suggested that, in the case of an accurate visual representation, the letter 'p' would also be used in place of the letter 'r'. However, it is not uncommon to find phonetic and visual representations used in the same Greeklish texts. It also seems that these go beyond spelling norms, creating spaces for sociological readings. As Themistocleous has pointed out, 'the choice of writing in CG affects the ways that Roman characters are used', a practice that is not 'just a response to technological constrains but it actually has a wider social significance'.[44]

English Words Written in Greek

As has been mentioned above, the songs of which the lyrics are discussed here belong to an array of popular music genres, most of which represent a globalised youth music culture (rock, rap, metal, etc.). It should therefore not come as a surprise that their lyrics also feature English words, something particularly common in rap/hip-hop tracks. As revealed in the research, when the lyricists/songwriters use the Greek script to write their lyrics, they type many of the English words with Greek characters as well. We see, for example, word formations like ΜΠΡΟ (bro), ΡΑΠΠΕΡΣ (rappers), ΓΚΑΓΣΤΕΡΣ [sic] (gangsters).

The reasons for this are hard to pinpoint without asking the songwriters themselves, but it could be the case that certain English words are so ingrained in the vocabulary of specific popular music genres, that they acquire a life of their own in the language variety of their local context. This can be supported by the fact that other words that appear in these same songs are typed in English, e.g., CAMP and BEAT. The latter presents yet another complication—it appears in a set of CG lyrics written in the Greek script, typed solely in capital letters. As all the characters of the word belong also to the Greek alphabet, it could be read in Greek (BEAT = V-E-A-T, which does not have a semantic meaning in the Greek language). Again, it is only if one is

[43] The words appear here exactly as found under the respective videos on YouTube.

[44] Themistocleous, 'Writing in a non-standard...' (no 7) 155.

familiar with the context and terminology of rap (or hears the song alongside posted lyrics), that they can read it as BEAT/beat.

The status of CG as a verbal variety and the incremental role of the internet as a medium to bring its written form into the daily lives of CG speakers and the public domain keep YouTube lyrics at the intersection of formal and informal texts. In their writings, the lyricists/songwriters make choices in line with their internet-literate, globalised generations, expressing in languages that they know intimately but lack the formal knowledge to codify, and therefore approach with freedom as creatives and agency as owners. Even a casual perusal of relevant songs on YouTube reveals interesting (in)consistencies, even regarding the most common words in the CG vocabulary. It is these observations that emphasise, once more, the personal choices made when artists turn to the codification of their lyrics. Given the freedom provided by CG's lack of official codification, the rendering of CG lyrics in writing creates space for the exercising of agency and presents the personal idiosyncrasies of the people who practice this rendering. Looking at a few words side by side:

- *Τζαι / τζιαι / je / j / τζ̆αι* (SMG: *και* / English: *and*)
- *Ψυσιήν/ ψυσσή / ΨΥΧΗ / ψυσ̆ές* (SMG: *ψυχή* / English: *soul*)
- *ΜΑΔΚΙΑ / ΜΑΘΚΙΑ / μμάθκια* (SMG: *μάτια* / English: *eyes*)

Instances like these again raise the issue of orthography. Due to the absence of standard codification of and education in CG, orthography is arguably not an issue. Nonetheless, due to the close relationship of the varieties of CG and SMG and the central presence of the latter as the official language in the education and public spheres of the RoC, orthographical errors emerge, leading at times to hegemonic practices of language correctness and language policing.[45] Orthography, as Sebba has also emphasised, is embedded in culture and situated in social practice.[46] The internet however is a different area, one that assigns its users much more freedom in this sense. As Themistocleous writes, 'spelling rules are not imposed in the domain of the internet, which means that internet users are free to use whichever orthographic practices they wish'.[47] It is in the dynamic space created between the two that the rendering of CG lyrics in writing and their posting on YouTube takes place.

[45] One major incident occurred with the 'Ως Δαμέ' protest movement. The then Minister of Education commented on the wrong spelling of the protest movement's name, which to many was a strategy to divert attention from its significance and undermine it by hegemonic language policing.

[46] Mark Sebba, *Spelling and Society: The Culture and Politics of Orthography around the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 13.

[47] Themistocleous, 'Written Cypriot Greek…' (no 7) 166.

Discussion

This paper presented four main practices/styles in which Greek Cypriot lyricists/songwriters choose to render their lyrics in writing: a) Greeklish; b) the use of the Greek script; c) the implementation of diacritics; and d) script mixing. The use of Greeklish that, according to Themistocleous, 'could also be connected with shedding the demonstration of loyalty to the norms imposed by societal institutions, thus a kind of rebellion against standard orthography',[48] is very important as a codifying medium on an online platform like YouTube. It is the script of the younger generation that, in the case of CG, is also convenient since it can signify sounds that cannot be represented with characters of the Greek script. In addition, as it is a script without specific rules, it can be used freely for writing in a language variety that has not been codified. The use of the Greek script for writing CG can also be interpreted as an act of ownership and agency. As the official language of the RoC, SMG is the one acquired through formal education; therefore, the Greek script is the Greek Cypriots' own script, and the one they can utilise creatively to write in the language variety of their everyday lives.

The use of diacritics, on the other hand, is an interesting choice for rendering CG lyrics in writing. The native lyricists/songwriters have never been taught this style and, therefore, its appearance on YouTube is either the work of editors, or the result of personal studies of CG dictionaries and literary texts. Although on one hand this might indicate a certain compliance with past (although informal and not standardised) norms, it could also be interpreted as a claim to the ownership of a language variety that is the one the songwriters live their lives and creatively express themselves in, but have been taught that they are not supposed to write in. This ownership is crystallised on the fact that, despite not having been taught it, the lyricists/songwriters decide to do their own research, to 'study' further, to access texts, and to reintroduce conventions of CG writing in their contemporary creations.

But, can any (or all) of these codification approaches be seen as reappropriation? Merriam Webster defines reappropriation as 'tak[ing] back or reclaim[ing] for one's own purposes'. In linguistics, reappropriation is also the 'cultural process by which a group reclaims words or artifacts that were previously used in a way disparaging of that group'.[49] It is argued here that the various ways in which CG lyrics are written

[48] Ibid.

[49] See, for example, Adam D. Galinsky & al., 'The Reappropriation of Stigmatizing Labels: Implications for Social Identity' in Jeffrey Polzer (ed.) *Identity Issues in Groups*, Vol. 5: Research on Managing Groups

and posted on YouTube by the local lyricists/songwriters *are* to be seen as acts of reappropriation, although this might not be the creators' direct intention. CG is a living language variety, a part of cultural heritage that is alive and evolving. While still negotiating its place in the public sphere alongside the official language, CG becomes more and more visible, both in its verbal and written forms, and this can be substantiated by the rising number of songs that use CG lyrics. The various ways in which lyricists/songwriters choose to render their lyrics in writing by inventing and employing their own understandings of how this could be done can be seen as a reclamation of their right to use CG and, therefore, a reappropriation of the right to write in one's language variety; a reappropriation they act upon by rendering their lyrics in writing, each in their own way, sometimes following conventions and sometimes applying innovative and idiosyncratic practices.

Taking it one step further, in light of the fact that local language ideology considers CG inferior and its use associated to lower educational and social levels, the second type of reappropriation (use of the Greek script) is also arguably relevant here. From this perspective, the contemporary lyricists/songwriters who express themselves in CG are giving this language variation an even greater gravitas, by sharing their words in the written form, therefore turning CG (a language variety they were taught should remain on the 'verbal' spectrum) to a variety that can carry their words, as they are inscribed and posted online to be read. It is important to note that this usually takes place with a contemporary approach, with words and spellings and scripts that are mirroring the current use of CG, including associations with the internet and global cultural trends (not least, the musical), complete with the use of English words. It is also important to note that this is a generational turn, 'an expression of the Greek-Cypriot youth identity', to repeat Themistocleous' words in relation to computer-mediated communication.[50] It is a generational turn that unfolds in combination with other ways in which the young creatives reappropriate and reinvent elements of the cultural heritage, slowly shifting the ways in which the Cypriot aspect becomes a more definitive part of their expression.[51]

and Teams (Bingley: Emerald, 2003) 221.

[50] Themistocleous, 'Written Cypriot Greek…' (no 7) 485.

[51] See also Maria Kouvarou, 'A step back, a leap forward: Tradition, heritage, and visions of a new post-colonial self in the Greek Cypriot popular music of the 21st century' (2024) 30(3) *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 285.

Coda

With the significant development of digital technologies, including generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), the issue of CG use on online platforms might pose a linguistic challenge and open new spaces for further research. Considering that CG is not officially codified and is spoken by a very small fraction of the world population, it can be considered a low-resource language and, therefore, a challenge for natural language processing models.[52] Considering, also, that we have been discussing the codification of song lyrics, it could also create interesting observations on how spoken language identification technology will work in relation to CG,[53] and whether the results will be codified in the Greek or the Latin script (i.e., Greeklish). However, despite the way in which AI will adapt (if at all) and what type of relation will be created in terms of language codification in the context of CG, at the moment, and for the topic discussed here, we can only rely on data derived from human input.

It is the agency exercised by the creatives of the RoC and the decisions they consciously made while codifying their CG lyrics that created the most imminent need for discussion. As pointed out above, in doing so, they appear to be less confined by any ideologies linked to the language (be it national, social, or political), and to be actively practising their right to express in whichever language variety they choose at any time, both verbally and in written form. Of course, one needs to be careful not to over-romanticise such developments, and strive to read in them the various factors that have been merging throughout the years, as life in the RoC moved on and will continue to move on, technological developments notwithstanding. This is the stance that this research attempted to take, while listening to countless songs created by Greek Cypriot lyricists/songwriters, and playing the read-the-script game on YouTube.[54]

[52] Nitesh Upadhaya, 'AI-Augmented Dynamic Language Adaptation for Low-Resource Languages: A Transfer Learning Solution for Optimized NLP Performance' (2024) 9(4) *International Research Journal of Advanced Engineering and Science* 89.

[53] See, for example, Dmytro V. Lande & al., 'Spoken Language Identification Based on the Transcript Analysis' (2022) 38 *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 38 for a case study on spoken language identification that involved the Russian and Ukrainian languages.

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