Jérémy Genette

    Universiteit Antwerpen

    CLiPS Computational Linguistics & Psycholinguistics Research Center

    Linguistics Departement

    Stadscampus - L 305

    Prinsstraat 13 - 2000 Antwerpen

    jeremy.genette@uantwerpen.be

1. Introduction

Language has long been shown to play an important role in the formation of one's identity (e.g., Bucholtz and Hall, 2004; Joseph, 2004; Edwards, 2009; Norton, 2010; Preece, 2016). Moreover, cultural identity clarity is also crucial for the construction of personal identity (Taylor, 1997; Usborne and Taylor, 2010). It means that the ability to clearly define the cultural group with which one identifies is of paramount importance for one's identity at the individual level. In fact, a clearly defined cultural identity gives access to a prototype with which to begin the self-definition process. As a consequence, cultural identity clarity can even contribute to well-being. Conversely, it entails that a vague socio-cultural identity can adversely affect the construction of self-identity. This raises thus the question of self-identification for language communities whose origins are unclear.

To date, the history of some languages, such as Basque (e.g., Trask, 1996) or Japanese (e.g., Benedict, 1990; Robbeets, 2005), is still under debate even among experts in the field. Calabrian Greek constitutes another interesting case of a linguistic variety whose origin is anything but firmly established. This Greek dialect is spoken by a small community in the extreme southern part of the Italian peninsula, but it is unclear to which Greek period of domination its language goes back. To date, three hypotheses have tried to explain the origins of Greek in Calabria by dating it back either to the classical or to the Byzantine Greek period, or by considering that both had an influence to some extent.

Despite this uncertainty, Calabrian Greek speakers –and even the local population who does not speak this Greek variety– identify with Calabrian Greek and assert an «association to the language through territorial belonging» (Pipyrou, 2012: 74). As «beliefs about language are never neutral» (Lytra, 2016: 135), Calabrian Greek constitutes an interesting case to investigate how beliefs about a language interplay with self-identification needs when the disagreement between linguists paves the way for personal choices as to which hypothesis is valid. This research thus aims at assessing how linguistic theories and self-identification interact.

We begin by introducing the Calabrian Greek situation as well as the debate surrounding the question of its origin. Second, the validity of the three main hypotheses is discussed along with their relevance for self-identification. Third, we describe the methodology used for the study. Fourth, we present and discuss the results. Finally, we summarise the main findings and acknowledge the limitations of the study.

2. The Calabrian Greek-speaking area

Two Greek-speaking communities are nowadays situated in Italy: one in Calabria and one in Apulia. Both are said to be historically and linguistically related to each other (Squillaci, 2017: 145), but their origins are still debated. The Calabrian and Apulian Greek varieties can be distinguished by referring to them as Greko and Griko, respectively. Both are called Italiot Greek or Italo-Greek. For the sake of clarity, the term Calabrian Greek (henceforth, CG) will be used throughout this manuscript as this chapter focuses specifically on the variety spoken in Calabria, rather than its Apulian counterpart. The CG area is located south of the Aspromonte Massif around the Amendolea valley. Nowadays, CG is spoken in the villages of Bova, Chorio di Roghudi, Condofuri, Gallicianò and Roghudi Nuovo (Ledgeway et al., 2020: 6). It is an endangered language mainly spoken by people born in the first half of the twentieth century. Squillaci (2017: 151) estimates the number of speakers to be as low as 300-350, while most of the highest estimates suggest around 500 speakers (see Ledgeway et al., 2020: 6).

Despite the restricted number of native speakers, the inhabitants of the area –be they CG speakers or not– distinguish themselves by asserting their Greek identity via an «in-group/out-group distinction» in Merino and Tileagă's terms (2011: 88) and feel an association to that language, which they consider as the peculiarity of their place (Sacco, 2007: 215-216; Pipyrou, 2012: 74). This identification as Greek not only exists at the individual level, but also at the public level. In some places, street names are indicated in both Italian and Greek, some municipalities are twinned with Greek ones, and Greek flags are hung in front of some town halls. As highlighted by Sacco (2007) and Pipyrou (2012), the local historical, cultural and linguistic heritage is mobilized as a basis for the touristic and economic development of the area.

This demonstrates self-identification with a language whose history is uncertain. However, as Friedman (1994: 117) argues, «self-definition does not occur in a vacuum, but in a world already defined». Under the premise that «making history is a way of producing identity» (Friedman, 1994: 117), it makes sense to question how social groups construct themselves by creating their linguistic history when historical linguistics could not reach consensus. This is especially relevant when linguistic hypotheses intermingle with self-identification needs, which are further mobilized by public actors. In fact, as the experts do not agree on a single and undisputed hypothesis, the inhabitants can feel free to opt for the hypothesis which is the most favourable to them.

As suggested above, beliefs about a language are not neutral and in the absence of clear evidence, they can choose the hypothesis which fits the way they want to define themselves. Furthermore, as Pipyrou (2012: 86) rightly highlights about the CG situation, the appropriation of the debate by public actors has «further shaped particular subjectivities amongst the local populations» and has contributed to developing the way in which CG speakers politicize their claims. The understanding of the criteria underlying the adoption of any of the proposed hypotheses regarding the origin of CG by the inhabitants is thus of interest and constitutes the main aim of the present study.

3. The hypotheses on the genesis of Calabrian Greek today

To better understand the question of the origins of CG, a few historical landmarks are needed. The first Greek settlements in this area can be traced back to the Magna Graecia period, during which Greek colons settled along the coast. In the third century B.C., the Romans might have conquered those lands (Placanica, 1999) and potentially latinized its population. From the sixth or seventh century A.D., the Greek influence came back in Calabria under the administration of the Byzantine Empire (Morosi, 1870; Battisti, 1927; Placanica, 1999). The Hellenic cultural domination deteriorated progressively and came to an end with the Norman conquest in 1060 (Battisti, 1927; Rohlfs 1974; Placanica, 1999). Due to the adoption of Latin rite by the Diocese of Bova (Rohlfs, 1974; Squillaci, 2017), the Unification of Italy, the linguistic policies of the Fascist Regime and the socio-economic situation of the area (Squillaci, 2017), the number of speakers continuously decreased over the centuries. However, from the late 1970s, the inhabitants' attitude started to turn positive as the activism and revitalization movement for CG raised in the area (Squillaci, 2017).

The question is thus the following: did CG originate from classical Greek, Byzantine Greek or both? For the sake of clarity, those will be referred throughout this chapter as the classical, Byzantine and mixed hypotheses, respectively. From another perspective, the question can be reformulated as to whether the Italo-Romance varieties currently spoken in the Hellenophone area of Calabria are Romance or Neo-Romance, i.e., whether Latin reached Calabria during Antiquity and evolved into Romance linguistic varieties or whether the Romance varieties reached Calabria as full-fledged Romance varieties after Latin had disappeared.

The main conclusion from the literature is that the validity of a specific hypothesis has never been proved. Fanciullo (1996: 33) assumed that this issue was far from being resolved. Some of the most recent papers on the topic confirm Fanciullo's assumption by showing

conflicting views. For instance, Squillaci (2017: 146) believes that «there is sufficient evidence to maintain the continuity [i.e., classical] hypothesis», while Ledgeway et al. (2020: 6) claim that the latter has become unpopular and that the Byzantine hypothesis is «widely accepted». In other words, there are still conflicting opinions in this debate in which, according to Fanciullo (1996: 41), ideology has won over reflection.

The following sections give an overview of the three different hypotheses and examine them according to four criteria, namely their epistemological validity, their prestige, the fame of their main exponents, and the question of cultural identity clarity.

3.1. The three hypotheses

The theory suggesting the Magno-Greek origin of CG was essentially developed by the philologist Gerhard Rohlfs in the twentieth century. Rohlfs (1967, 1974) claimed that the origin of the CG dates back to the Magna Graecia period and that this Greek variety never stopped being spoken despite the Roman conquest of the area. During the Byzantine period, Calabria was once again under the influence of Greece, but CG went on evolving from classical Greek, not from Byzantine Greek.

The Byzantine hypothesis, on the other hand, dates back to the mid-nineteenth century and was essentially put forward by Giuseppe Morosi (1870), Carlo Battisi (1927) and Oronzo Parlangèli (1953). They defended the idea that Italiot Greek goes back to the Byzantine period of domination. Certainly, the Magna Graecia period would have brought the Greek language to Calabria, but the Roman conquest would have triggered its Latinization, after which the Byzantine Empire would have brought the Greek language to Calabria once again. The present Greek variety in Calabria would derive from the latter variety.

More recently, another thesis has been emerging (Fanciullo, 1996). It brings together the elements of the two previous hypotheses that are considered as certain, giving due weight to classical and Byzantine Greek in the formation of CG. According to this hypothesis, there would have been a Latinization of the territory, though only a partial one. Thus, Calabria would have been bilingual, if not multilingual. This theory makes it somehow possible to reconcile the classical and Byzantine ones.

3.2. Epistemological validity

In the debate surrounding the origin of CG, two types of arguments have been advanced: (i) linguistic arguments, i.e., elements in the CG language that seem to date back to a specific time in the history of the Greek language and (ii) external or historical evidence which should

attest the use of a specific linguistic variety at a specific point in time. This section summarizes some of the most central arguments of the different theses and potential revaluations.

As far as the classical hypothesis is concerned, the main linguistic arguments rely on the presence of archaic elements in CG, mostly of a lexical nature, which date back to Ancient Greek and which had already disappeared from the Greek language by the Byzantine period. For example, CG pútten 'whence' retains the form of the archaic πόθεν (= *ποῦνθεν), contrary to Modern Greek ἀπό ποῦ (Rohlfs, 1967: 169). Similarly, the CG word for 'sister-in-law', grambí, is closely related to Ancient Greek γαμβρή, unlike Modern Greek νύφη. Therefore, their presence in CG indicates that they reached southern Italy before the Byzantine period (Rohlfs, 1974). However, some points in Rohlfs's argumentation are nowadays considered to need revaluation and the presence of lexical items of Slavic and Arabic origin was not given its due place in the debate by Rohlfs (Trumper, 2013). Moreover, recent advances in the study of Middle Greek and peripherical Modern Greek dialects have challenged the validity of relying mainly on lexical grounds to determine the origin of a dialectal variety (Trumper, 2013: 442). Further linguistic evidence in favour of the classical hypothesis advanced by Rohlfs lies in the recentness of the Italo-Romance dialects spoken in the area, which he considers to be most probably the result of Neo-Romanization during the Middle-Ages, rather than Latinization during Antiquity (Rohlfs, 1967, 1974). Drawing on external arguments, one central support for the classical hypothesis is the present use of Greek in southern Italy, while it is not spoken anymore in Ravenna or Sardinia nor in the surrounding area of Bari, which were also under Byzantine rule for centuries (Rohlfs, 1967, 1974). Another argument used by Rohlfs is Strabo's description of Naples, Taranto and Reggio in his Geography. In fact, the Greek geographer attests the preservation of the Greek language in those areas even after the destruction of Magna Graecia colonial cities (Rohlfs, 1967, 1974). It entails that Greek was still spoken in the area after the Roman conquest.

Conversely, the fact that CG is similar to the present variety spoken in Greece has often formed the central argument supporting the Byzantine thesis (e.g., Morosi, 1870: 186). Similarly, the aforementioned Slavic and Arabic lexical elements indicate that they must have arrived in Calabria during the Byzantine domination period (Trumper, 2013). This thesis would also be supported by Latin inscriptions found in the area, implying its Latinization. On the contrary, the small quantity and the type of antique Latin inscriptions found in the area were not considered as evidence of an effective Latinization by Rohlfs, but rather as the traces

of the use of Latin as a lingua nobilis (Rohlfs, 1967: 166-167), i.e., as a language variety which was spoken by upper-classes only.

Most probably, the external evidence should be considered as a clue to the presence of a specific variety at a specific time. However, caution is needed when making inference about the actual use of that variety by the local population, or a part thereof. Interestingly enough, even Rohlfs became less radical towards the end of his career, as La Fauci suggests by calling him a «repentant neo-romanist» (1984: 107, own translation).

In conclusion, in the absence of compelling historical evidence, we believe that the classical and Byzantine Greek varieties must both be given proper weight in the formation of CG for it is composed of both classical and Byzantine elements, although probably to different extents. On purely linguistic ground, it thus seems sound to cautiously argue that both varieties shaped CG to some extent. This is precisely what the mixed hypothesis suggests (Fanciullo, 1996). In other words, we believe that, with the evidence available to date, it is sensible to opt for the mixed hypothesis. The formulation of the classical and Byzantine hypotheses seems too extreme.

3.3. Prestige

The role of prestige in the adoption of linguistic features has often been studied by sociolinguists (e.g., Labov, 1965, 1986; Trudgill, 1972; Giles et al., 1974). As far as CG is concerned, it seems plausible to assume that prestige might have an influence on the adoption of a specific hypothesis. It could be theorised that the classical hypothesis –by referring directly to Ancient Greece– is endowed with a certain prestige. In fact, the Ancient Greece era is commonly assumed to be the cradle of European Culture since the Renaissance (Friedman, 1994: 118). We believe that defining oneself as descendants of a society –being society a construct or a historical fact– whose science, philosophy and democracy are said to be the source of European modern societies (Friedman, 1994: 118), might be perceived as a source of prestige by the local population. The prestige of the Ancient Greek culture is therefore considered as a reason for the necessity to maintain the «richness and the grandiloquence of a glorious era» by preserving the language (Pipyrou, 2012: 86). This might also be the reason why the classical theory is favoured in Greece (Fanciullo, 1996: 68). Prestige might thus be an advantage of the classical and –even if to a lower extent– mixed hypothesis over the Byzantine hypothesis.

It should be at this point noted that amongst nationalist circles –and probably, especially during the inter-war period– prestige was also a key feature of the promotion of the

Byzantine hypothesis. According to the nationalist ideology, the Roman Empire was considered a model to follow because of its unification and universalist aspirations (e.g., Gentile, 1998; Tarquini, 2017). Therefore, the classical Greek hypothesis –implying by definition the failed Latinization of the area by the Roman Empire– was considered less prestigious by the nationalist doctrine (Fanciullo, 1996: 59).

Already during the twentieth century, but even nowadays, the adoption of one hypothesis about the origin of CG might therefore be a matter of prestige. The values of prestige might change over time and vary between individuals, but its role in the formation of the inhabitants' opinions should not be neglected.

3.4. The exponents

A further aspect that should be assessed is the figure of the linguist(s) who utterly advocated for a given hypothesis. In fact, as soon as one wants to approach the debate on the origins of CG, one scholar stands out: Gerhard Rohlfs, who is considered very important by the local population. His fieldwork on CG and the large amount of time he spent with the local population made him a very important representative of CG culture and language in the Hellenophone area and beyond, being his contribution fundamental to place the CG community on the map.

Consequently, the German linguist was awarded the honorary citizenship of the Bova municipality in 1968. Another compelling illustration of Gerhard Rohlfs's popularity in the Greek area is the fact that the museum of the CG language in Bova is named after him. Therefore, it is not a surprise that the museum –supported by public funds, by the way– asserts the validity of the classical hypothesis on its website: «Rohlfs […] succeeded in demonstrating its Magno-Greek origin, rejecting the [Byzantine] hypothesis» (Museo della Lingua Greco-Calabra Gerhard Rohlfs, 2019).

The aforementioned elements suggest a close relationship between Rohlfs and the local population. The exponents of the other theories are not given such importance by the local community. Therefore, it is probable that the interplay between the local population and the exponents of specific hypotheses may influence to some extent the opinion of the members of that community on the origin of CG.

3.5. Cultural identity clarity

Turning now the attention to cultural identity clarity, previous studies in social psychology (e.g., Taylor, 1997; Usborne and Taylor, 2010) have suggested that people tend to identify

with groups whose definition is clear. Providing people with focused prototypes would favour their turning to a specific group (Usborne and Taylor 2010: 884). If we extrapolate these ideas to the CG situation, it is plausible to assume that the inhabitants might more easily identify with a collective identity whose origin is clearly defined, as with the classical and Byzantine hypothesis, and not with a trade-off between both, as suggested by the mixed hypothesis.

In conclusion, the above discussion provides insights into four criteria that might play a role in the adoption of one or the other hypothesis by the inhabitants of the Hellenophone area. Criteria such as prestige, cultural identity clarity or even the exponents who advocated for the different theories might thus guide the choice of the local population. It is assumed that according to the degree to which one identifies with CG, some factors can be given more importance than others. Consequently, a given theory might be preferred over another. The effect of sociolinguistic variables on the adoption of the different theories was analysed in the present research through a questionnaire.

4. Methodology

A sociolinguistic online survey[1] was carried out to investigate the potential effect of sociolinguistic variables on the adoption of one of the main three hypotheses by the inhabitants of the Hellenophone area. Statistical modelling was used to simulate the effect of different predictors. Table 1 displays how the criteria presented in the theoretical framework can be associated with favouring (+) or disfavouring (-) roles, as well as how in some cases this remains ambiguous (+/-).

	classical	Byzantine	mixed
Validity	+/-	+/-	+
Prestige	+	-	+
Exponents	+	-	-
Cultural identity clarity	+	+	-

Table 1: Summary of criteria which potentially favour (+) or disfavour (-) the adoption of a specific hypothesis or criteria whose role is unclear (+/-).

4.1. Sociolinguistic survey

The survey was designed to get information about the linguistic varieties the inhabitants of the area speak, their opinion about the origin of CG and their interest in that Greek dialect.

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[1] The reader can access the survey at the following link: https://forms.gle/qZna3N5iUK4HZs3DA. Note that some items of the survey aimed at another research question.

Snowball sampling was adopted, as the survey was shared via social networks and by word of mouth. It was structured into four parts.

The first one aimed at gathering demographic information about the participants, such as gender, age and the amount of time the participants had lived in the Greek-speaking area. To investigate the potential effect of age, the participants were divided into three groups. A first group ranged from 50 years old onwards, i.e., people who were born at the time of the first revitalization activities in the late 1960s. A second group consisted of people between 18 and 50 years old. A third group comprised people under the age of legal majority in Italy (18 years old) and who are therefore born after the promulgation of Law 482/99 in December 1999 which stipulates that twelve minority languages, including Greek, should be safeguarded in Italy.

The second part of the questionnaire investigated the linguistic repertoire of the participants, i.e., the different linguistic varieties they use in their daily life. They were instructed to declare if they speak one of the following linguistic varieties: neo-standard Italian, regional Italian, an Italo-Romance dialect, CG, Modern Greek or any other language[2]. Moreover, they were asked to state in which of the following contexts the varieties are used: with the elderly, at home, with friends, at work or never.

The third section sought to gain insights into the participants' interest in CG. The participants could answer an open-ended question about what CG means to them. They also had to indicate their interest in CG on a seven-level Likert scale. The self-declared interest scores were normalized into z-scores.

Finally, the last part inquired about the participants' belief regarding the truth of the hypotheses surrounding the origin of CG: that is, the participants were asked whether CG originates from classical Greek, Byzantine Greek, both or whether they do not know.

4.2. Participants

In total, twenty-nine participants took part in the survey. Participants who did not declare living in the Hellenophone area were excluded from the study. Furthermore, the participants were only included in the study if they answered the questions about their linguistic repertoire, the question on their self-declared interest in CG and the question on the origin of CG, except if they indicated they did not know the answer. Seven participants were excluded

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[2] The varieties were named in such a way as to be easily understood by people not accustomed to the traditional Italian linguistics classification. (Neo-)standard Italian was referred to as «italiano», regional Italian and the dialectal koiné as «italiano con un poco di calabrese» and Italo-Romance dialect as «calabrese».

based on these criteria. Only twenty-one out of the twenty-two selected participants fully answered the demographic questions. Those twenty-one participants constitute our final sample. Among them, only one participant was younger than 18 years old, seventeen subjects were between 18 and 50 years old and three participants were older than 50 years old. In our final selection, nearly 48% of the participants speak CG in at least one context (see Table 2). From that perspective, our corpus is quite balanced. Despite the small sample size, which results, among other reasons, from the small size of the population of interest and the difficulty to reach older speakers, we believe that they allow us to gain novel (yet preliminary) insights into the present topic, although our findings will need to be confirmed in future research.

	Neo-standard Italian	Regional Italian	Italo-Romance dialect	Calabrian Greek	Modern Greek	Other
At home	0.476	0.571	0.571	0.190	0.048	0.048
At work	0.762	0.095	0.095	0.095	0.095	0.143
With friends	0.619	0.333	0.429	0.238	0.143	0.143
With the elderly	0.333	0.286	0.524	0.381	0	0
Total	0.81	0.667	0.667	0.476	0.238	0.238

Table 2: Relative frequency of linguistic varieties spoken by the participants according to the context of use.

5. Results and discussion

To verify the potential effect of each predictor, multinomial logistic regression models were constructed with the hypothesis preferred by the participants as the dependent variable. Given the limited sample size, the models do not include interactions. The analyses were carried out in R (R Core Team, 2015). This procedure makes it possible to observe whether the addition of a predictor to an intercept-only model improves the fit between the model and the gathered data.

A multinomial logistic regression was performed to create a model of the relationship between self-declared interest in CG and the adoption of the three hypotheses (classical, Byzantine, and mixed). The addition of self-declared interest as a predictor improved the fit of the model, L.R. $\chi^2(2, 21) = 7.9958$, p $= 0.018$. This model achieves a classification accuracy of 0.619, slightly better than chance level. Chance level was 0.333, since there are three theories. Figure 1 shows that, as the interest in CG increases, the probability that one inhabitant adopts the Byzantine hypothesis decreases from 0.953 to 0.056. In contrast, the probability that one inhabitant adopts the mixed hypothesis increases –from 0.026 to 0.626–

as their interest rises. A slighter increase of the probability to adopt the classical hypothesis in the same direction is observed from 0.022 to 0.328.
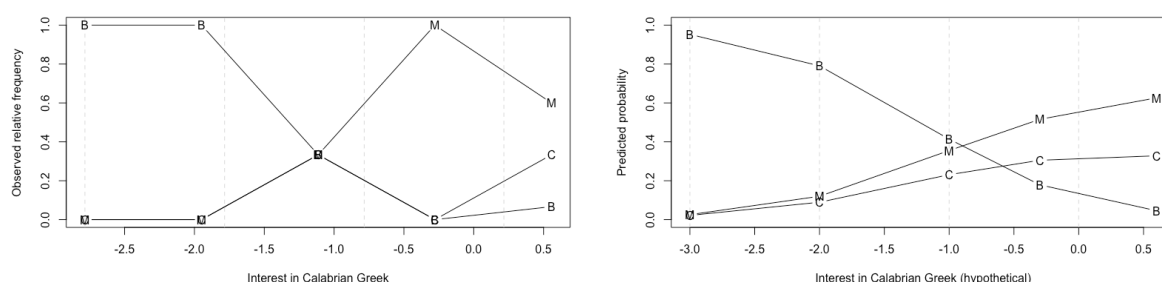

Figure 1: Observed relative frequency in our corpus (left) and predicted probabilities by the augmented model (right) of the adoption of the three hypotheses (C: classical, B: Byzantine, M: mixed) as a function of self-declared interest in CG expressed in z-scores.

Another model was created with proficiency in CG as predictor. The basic model improved with this predictor as well, L.R. χ^2 (2, 21) = 6.267, p = 0.044. The augmented model reaches a classification accuracy of 0.524, again above chance level. As can be seen from Figure 2, inhabitants who do not speak CG adopts most often the mixed hypothesis (0.455), and the Byzantine hypothesis with a slightly lower probability (0.364), while the classical hypothesis is the less favoured theory (0.182). However, CG speakers have a higher probability of adopting the mixed (0.599) rather than the classical hypothesis (0.4), while the probability of adopting the Byzantine hypothesis is close to zero (<0.001). Other models were constructed with age, gender and the amount of time spent in the area as predictors but none of them significantly improved the basic model.
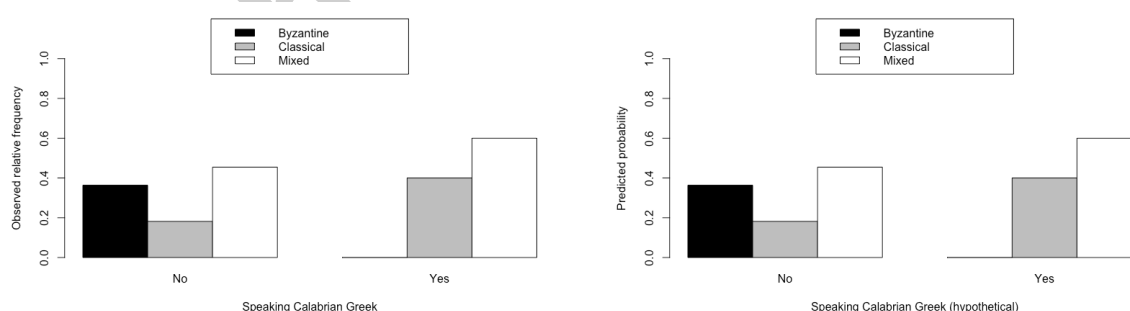

Figure 2: Observed relative frequency in our corpus (left) and predicted probabilities by the augmented model (right) of the adoption of the three hypotheses as a function of the ability to speak CG.

Our findings reveal a link between self-declared interest in CG and the supported hypothesis regarding the origin of CG. The Byzantine hypothesis is more likely to be favoured by people who are less interested in CG, while the mixed hypothesis is more likely to be adopted by CG speakers who are particularly interested in this language variety. We hypothesise that people

who are more interested in CG are more likely to be acquainted with the debate surrounding its origin and are thus more influenced by the epistemological criterion together with prestige. If we now focus on the adoption of the classical hypothesis, its probability increases as interest in CG rises. As its epistemological validity cannot be asserted, we believe that prestige, Rohlfs's fame, and the cultural identity clarity might play a role in the adoption of this theory by people who are more interested in CG. On the contrary, the Byzantine hypothesis, which offers fewer advantages according to the aforementioned criteria, is adopted by inhabitants who are less interested in CG.

It is probable that the same criteria are responsible for the preference for the mixed and the classical hypothesis by people who speak CG. Similarly, the most preferred theory among inhabitants who do not speak CG is the mixed hypothesis. It is interesting to note that the classical theory seems less favoured by people who do not speak CG. The reasons for this remain unclear. However, they do not discard the Byzantine hypothesis as much as CG speakers do.

6. Conclusions

It has long been demonstrated that language is constitutive of one's identity (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004; Joseph, 2004; Edwards, 2009; Norton, 2010; Preece, 2016). However, despite years of research, the origins of some languages such as Basque (Trask, 1996), Japanese (Benedict, 1990; Robbeets, 2005) or CG (Fanciullo, 1996) are still disputed amongst experts. When the history of a language is not clearly delineated even by experts in the field, it is to be assumed that the local population's beliefs about their language are not guided by epistemological validity only.

Some social variables at play in this process were investigated in the present study through the analysis of the CG situation. From a theoretical perspective, all three hypotheses about its origin have pros and cons. Specifically, we examined via a questionnaire the potential effect of epistemological validity, prestige, cultural identity clarity as well as that of the exponents of the different theories on the adoption of one of the three main hypotheses about the origin of CG. The mixed hypothesis seems to be commonly preferred over the classic and Byzantine theories mostly because of its probable epistemological validity. The classical hypothesis has the advantage of prestige, Rohlfs's fame and cultural identity clarity, while the arguably sole advantage of the Byzantine hypothesis is cultural identity clarity.

Although the results of the sociolinguistic survey need to be treated with caution given the limited sample size, they suggest that inhabitants speaking CG or particularly interested in

that variety favour the mixed hypothesis, probably mainly thanks to its epistemological validity. Although to a lesser degree, they also support the classical hypothesis, probably because of prestige, cultural identity clarity and the importance of its exponents. Conversely, the Byzantine hypothesis seems to be more often adopted by inhabitants who are less interested in CG or do not speak it. In other words, the results of the survey show that epistemological validity, prestige, the exponents and cultural identity clarity are more likely to guide the choice of the inhabitants who identify more than others with CG.

It may be useful, however, to signal some limitations due to the methodological choices that were made. It should be noted that this research does not engage with factors such as the level of education of the participants, their level of proficiency in CG and knowledge of Ancient Greek. As the sample size of this exploratory study was too small to include so many variables in the model, we focused on the factors that might be evaluated more reliably through an online survey. Future research should attempt to investigate these additional, unexplored factors. Further data collection is also required to determine the extent to which the non-randomized selection procedure has an impact on our findings as well as the specific role of each criterion.

Further studies on the current topic might include a comparison with the Apulian Greek community to observe whether the same factors are at play. It might also be of interest to examine the interplay between self-identification and linguistic theories in linguistic communities whose origin is uncertain beyond the south of the Italian peninsula or communities which are not endangered, unlike CG.

Although our findings pertain to a very specific case, we believe that they may be representative of wider mechanisms in individuals' beliefs about the origin of a linguistic variety, especially for minority and endangered languages. Overall, our findings suggest that self-identification needs and epistemological validity intermingle in locals' adoption of one hypothesis. Besides epistemological validity, factors such as prestige, cultural identity clarity and the exponents of each theory play a major role if the identification with the language is stronger. In other words, our contribution shows how a local population can mobilize a historical linguistics debate and we highlight a range of factors that can contribute to this process.

Acknowledgements

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