

IS CYPRUS AN ESL COUNTRY?

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1. INTRODUCTION

Bhaskaran Nayar (1997) provides an overview of the history of the terms ESL and EFL. He distinguishes two major traditions in the use of the former, both relating to situations in which English may be seen as culturally intrusive:

ESL1: The largely British sense, relating to the use of English in post-colonial situations where it is not the L1 of the majority but retains official or semi-official functions.

ESL2: The largely American sense, relating essentially to the teaching of English to temporary and permanent immigrants.

By contrast, the term EFL has been used where cultural (and political) intrusion is seen as minimal. 'EFL country' describes such a case as China, where English has had no institutionalised internal use except as a school subject, being taught essentially for communication with the outside world.

Nayar's addition to this list is the following (citing Faerch et al. 1984; Phillipson, 1991):

ESL3: In, for instance, Denmark (in the above terms, an EFL country – cf. also Christophersen, 1991), English 'has a high enough profile in education' to ensure that virtually all educated people have a practical competence, available for use in 'European and international contexts'.

ESL3 seems to mirror the *aspirations* of much of the ESL1 world: to capitalise on existing standards of English, using it as a 'window on the world', with emphasis on the school subject but without other official internal functions and therefore maintaining the integrity of the local national language.

In view of the colonial background of English in Cyprus, we start from the assumption that this is an ESL1 country (henceforth just 'ESL'). But to generalise directly from the usual themes of the ESL literature could be quite seriously misleading. We suggest one subclassification crucial to a relatively neglected range of cases: *complex* vs. *simplex* ESL.

2. COMPLEX VS. SIMPLEX ESL

2.1 *Complex* ESL

Nayar cites with approval a representative statement by Wilkins (1972) that 'almost by definition the countries where the L2 will be a second language are multilingual states'. A distinguished tradition of commentary has indeed focussed on ESL situations in linguistically heterogeneous nations: India, Nigeria, Singapore, South

Africa, and so forth. Such ESL situations have been seen as presenting interesting sociolinguistic complexities from which emerge a series of ideological dilemmas, deriving from the entrenchment of the colonial language in both national and sub-national functions (for some approaches, see (Pride 1982), Kachru (1982,1997), , Quirk (1988) Phillipson (1992), Pennycook (1994), Widdowson (1997), Brutt-Griffler (1998).

2.2 Simplex ESL

Relatively neglected has been a distinct type which we label 'simplex' ESL, as for instance in Hong Kong, Malta, Lesotho, Swaziland, and potentially various remaining dependencies of the English-speaking powers. These share the defining characteristic of *repertorial smallness*: aside from English, only one other language is widely spoken. The effect of this single factor is a radical simplification of issues. There is a ready-made national language, no need for English in a link function, no motivation for the recognition of 'nativised' varieties, and no controversial special relationships with speakers of particular local languages at sub-regional levels. What remains to be decided is the distribution of functions between English and one local language, along a single *national-international* parameter.

2.2.1 National and international domains

The key factor appears to be the retention of the local language in domains seen as critical for the concept of nationhood. Outcomes may then vary considerably in the allocation of what we shall call the 'middle ground' of areas that combine national status with inherently international connections (for instance higher education). However, in so far as they are subject to decisions by a single language community, simplex situations regularly promote the evolution of reasonably stable, largely acceptable resolutions. Clear acknowledgement of the place of the national language in principle and in practice clears the way for harmonious incorporation of a relatively wide range of 'international' functions for English, often encroaching well into the middle ground. For instance Boyle (1997), surveying four studies of attitudes to English in Hong Kong, commenting on the relation of English as international language to Cantonese as language of ethnicity, concludes that 'The new generation...looks on English more as a challenging tool for better business than as an invasive threat to their cultural identity'. Compare, under otherwise quite different circumstances, Davidson's (1996) conclusions for Malta. While English is instrumentally dominant, Malti 'remains the home language and has secure official status and its own cultural prestige.' Under this circumstance, 'the two national languages of Malta sit side by side largely unaffected by each other,' and 'against all odds at the end of the twentieth century, Malti is alive and well, while English also flourishes in the sun.' So too in Swaziland, where there is joint use of English and siSwati in government business, the role of English remains relatively uncontroversial while the national language retains official recognition and a secure place in traditional domains essential to Swazi culture (Kamwangamalu 1996). Contrast the role of English, invasive of areas crucial for national consciousness, reported from

such other relatively small but repertorially *complex* societies as Singapore (Kamwangamalu 1992) or even in the otherwise quite different circumstances of Switzerland (Dürfmüller 1991).

3. CYPRUS

With the de facto partition of the island of Cyprus in 1974, both parts shifted effectively from complex to simplex ESL. In the south, this has been followed by a resolution favourable to Greek in official use, apparently legitimising an otherwise widespread use of English in the private sector.

3.1 *Complex ESL*

At independence in 1960, Cyprus had been in our terms a complex ESL society. A strong tradition of English use, particularly in certain elite groups, and an otherwise linguistically heterogeneous population, disallowed the choice of a unique local national language and provided a natural case for maintenance of English in its already well-established link function. In the constitution of the republic, English is mentioned only in the appendix on transitional provisions. It appears to have been assumed that it would gradually be eliminated from official use. However, as in other complex ESL situations, there is little evidence that the assumption was justified. We take as symptomatic the lack of progress in the removal of English from four public areas: (a) government, (b) the law, (c) higher education, (d) road signs, other public notices, and official forms:

(a) Article 3 of the 1960 constitution provides that all 'legislative, executive and administrative acts and documents' should be drawn up in both the official languages of the republic' (stated to be Greek and Turkish). Nevertheless, major government reports which continued to be issued in English included, among others, those of the Department of Antiquities (Perdikes, 1993), and such practice appears to have been widespread.

(b) Article 189 stipulated as an interim measure that English could be used in court proceedings for a period of five years (during which time the laws would be translated). This period was prolonged in 1965, but in 1988 still only 29 of the 354 laws had been translated (Karyolemu, 1999).

(c) In the primary and secondary education sectors, controlled by the Greek and Turkish Communal Chambers, the respective official languages were used as media. But where national institutions were founded with mixed Greek/Turkish populations, as at the Higher Hotel Institute of Cyprus (1965) and the Higher Technical Institute (1968), English was the only feasible medium.

(d) Road signs continued to employ 'English' versions of place names, such as Nicosia, *Limassol*, Famagusta (alone or with Greek and/or Turkish equivalents). Pavlou (1990) noted that English remained the operating language of the customhouse, the hospital, the veterinary clinic, the post office and the telephone service (so that the Cypriot must use English to interpret a customs declaration form, a notice of hospital working hours, a veterinary disease certificate, a notification of packet delivery, or an emergency telephone instruction). In the majority of cases, the

English versions of official forms continued in public use.

The continued entrenchment of English was widely seen as problematic, but its reduction was hampered by the need first to put in place, at least in official use, an impractical degree of Greek/Turkish parallelism.

3.2 Simplex ESL

After 1974, Turkish rapidly disappeared from both official and private use, remaining only in such special applications as the certification of births and deaths, and where explicitly required by the constitution as on coins, banknotes and postage stamps (Article 3.7). The new situation removed any internal link function for English, fuelling an intense reaction against its now unnecessary entrenchment. This became the subject of successive newspaper articles/letters, of popular publication and of academic debate (see for instance Papapavlou 1989, Pavlou 1990, Ioannou, 1991, Karoulla-Vrikkis 1991, and the 1991 seminar on the 'destruction' of the Greek language in Cyprus reported in Christodoulou (1993 — for a summary see Papapavlou 1997). In this climate of opinion, a survey conducted by Papapavlou (1988) found among Limassol high school students attitudes highly suspicious of the use and influence of the foreign language. As regards official policy, the turning point was a cabinet decision of 2.2.94 that henceforth Greek only be used in official communications except where very special reasons required otherwise. The subsequent letter of 25.2.94 relayed this to all branches of government as an instruction regarding any document addressed to Cypriots.

3.2.1 National domains

In response, English has been rapidly disappearing from official domains seen as strictly internal. Illustration follows for the same four areas as above:

(a) With few exceptions, major government reports are now produced in Greek (though often accompanied by an English version for international purposes). Consumption there may also

(b) In 1988, a new initiative was made in translation of the laws, with the decision that Greek versions be completed within a year. By an extended deadline of 1996 the new legislation was approved and published (Karyolemu, 1999).

(c) Following a long public debate, the state University of Cyprus was founded in 1989, accepting its first students in 1992 with Greek (and only nominally also Turkish) as medium of both undergraduate and postgraduate instruction. This ousting of English as the potential medium, and the subsequent perceived success of the University, has been a key factor in public recognition that the status of Greek as a national language is secure.

(d) There has been rapid replacement of the 'English' element in road signs by romanised transliterations of the Greek versions (*thus no longer Nicosia, Limassol, Famagusta but Lefkosia, Lemesos, Amochostos*). Within a similar time frame there has been a concerted drive to re-issue official forms in Greek versions. While the backlog of unadapted forms for internal official use appears substantial (it was generally estimated to us by relevant officials at around 50%), there has been a

striking overall change in the availability of Greek documents for public use. For instance, Greek (or sometimes bilingual) forms, receipts and correspondence are issued by the Electricity Authority, the Telecommunications Authority, the Department of Inland Revenue, and even now the Department of Customs & Excise. So too the situation in the Nicosia General Hospital is radically different from that described by Pavlou (1990). Within the building, virtually every public sign is now in Greek alone, and the transformation of other documentation has been similarly radical. The national Printing Office records a total of 86 items printed between 23.4.96 and 22.12.99 ranging from registration forms to records of inoculations.

3.2.2 International domains and the middle ground

Of main interest here are international uses of English *internal* to the boundaries of Cyprus. As elsewhere, the interconnectedness of modern economic conditions leads naturally to considerable local use of English in private sector business and industry, largely motivating a widespread demand for private tuition in English (in 1998, there were Cypriots took 15,900 registrations for exams in English organised by the British Council) and for English-medium education in the private tertiary sector (registrations for the academic year 1999-2000 totalled 6004, well outstripping the total of 3997 for state tertiary institutions). This effect is bolstered by the development of government policies, more or less contemporaneous with those reinforcing the official use of Greek, having the effect of further reinforcing the use of English in the private domain. At the 1992 census, the population of Cyprus (approximately 663,300) included (aside from 5000 Greeks) a total of 20,200 foreigners most of whom are likely to have used English as their language of out-group communication, including approximately 7,800 British, 1,800 Lebanese, 4,400 other Europeans, 2,400 other Arabs and 2,300 Asians. Included also was an influx since about 1989 of some 2000-3000 repatriated Cypriots per year, reaching 6000 in 1992, drawn almost exclusively from the UK and other ENL sources (DSR). During the 1990s, official policy has worked further to increase this international element in certain areas. By 1999, annual and peak-period August tourist arrivals were 2,434,300 and 341,400 respectively, just under half from the UK (DSR), the number of foreign workers was estimated at 41,000, including 9,500 domestics mainly from the Philippines and Sri Lanka (Migration Dept.) and in the 1999-2000 academic year there are 2074 foreign students registered in private English medium institutions of tertiary education. Given also the presence of UNFICYP, and the British garrison of the Sovereign Base Areas, it is likely that more English is being used in Cyprus today than at any previous time. Moreover, as regards the visible presence of the language in *private* sector notices and advertisements, the overall balance described by the contributors to Christodoulou (1993) appears hardly to have changed. Along the Makarios Avenue in Nicosia, where Pavlou (1990) had counted 65.7% English, 18.7% Greek and 15.6% mixed notices, an informal check in February 2000 suggests some reduction in the percentage of *monolingual* English. However in the tourist centre of Ayia Napa, except in municipal notices, one will now see virtually no Greek at all.

3.2.3 Current attitudes to English

Despite this extensive unofficial use of English, attitudes to the language appear strikingly more acquiescent than those reported in 3.2 above. The topic has more or less disappeared from newspaper columns. Scholarly and popular publication have moved on to other issues, including notably the question, prompted by the very success of Greek, of dominance relations between the Cypriot and standard varieties of the language. Accordingly the findings of Sciriha (1996) contrast radically with those earlier described by Papapavlou (1988). Attitudes among her broad sample were instrumentally positive towards English, as an international language. Fears of cultural intrusion involved primarily the role of Standard Greek as the major threat to the maintenance of the local dialect (compare in both respects Moschonas, 1996).

4. ESL3

Given the above, and prospective entry to the EU, we may ask whether Cyprus is moving towards ESL3 ('Danish ESL', itself apparently a simplex or small-country solution). While we think this may be so, there is a major reason for hesitation in taking Cyprus as a model. Nothing we have said is intended to suggest that the division of the island is either watertight or irreversible. However we suppose that a 'post-simplex' situation would again present possibilities quite different from the general stereotypes of postcolonial ESL.

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