

n-line Symposium on Assessment on multilingual contexts

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens | 15 May 2021

International Language Testing Association (ILTA)

Centre of Excellence for Multilingualism and Language Planning

TRANSLANGUAGING, BILINGUALISM AND LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT: THE CASE OF CYPRIOT ARABIC

Marilena Karyolemou



Assessing competence in a severely endangered oral language



MapCyArS

- **Focus of the presentation** | The development of a language test to assess competence in Cypriot Arabic. The test takes into consideration:
 - the severely endangered situation of the language
 - its exclusively oral character and
 - the sociolinguistic reality of language shift and the need to integrate this reality in the process of testing
- **MapCyArS** | *Mapping Cypriot Arabic speakers: An investigation into linguistic demography and the sociolinguistic profile of Kormakiot Maronites*
- **The project₁** | A three year project (2017-2020) financed by the A. G. Leventis Foundation at the University of Cyprus
- **The project₂** | Although this is not about multilingual assessment *per se*, it opens a window on how to integrate other languages, namely the dominant language, in assessing severely endangered oral languages, if we want to have any assessment at all > > pragmatic reasons in relation with the reality of language shift

A collaborative project

The linguists

Background work, know how to build up an assessment tool, aware of the pitfalls of language assessment and able to test the validity of the tool



The “native speakers”

Native-like competence in CA, are able to assist the development of the assessment test
Also able to make suggestions about what is important to assess



The speakers-researchers

Native-like competence in CA | speakers who are trained to work as researchers. Under this double identity they connect us to the community



The younger speakers

Non-native younger speakers or new speakers who have been working for the revitalization process. Their point of view as non native | new speakers speakers is important



Assessing competence in a severely endangered oral language

- **Why** | CA is a severely endangered oral language recognized as an indigenous minority language of Cyprus that is undergoing revitalization. To this date we have an imprecise picture of the number of speakers and of their degree of competence despite the fact that the revitalization process is in its ninth year
- **Why do we need to know** | 1. to be able to plan ahead | appropriate actions in support of the language through teaching 2. to make predictions for the language 3. for the community to know where it stands
- **Revitalizing through teaching** | Teaching CA to younger generations was a constant request by the community that felt unable to pass the language on to the next generations. Language courses for the young members of the community had started in August 2007, before the recognition of the language, without material as it was often done in other cases of revitalization involving oral languages

Assessing competence in a severely endangered oral language

Speakers +60

Near native speakers of CA. Exceptions are usually people whose parents were teachers or had positions of authority within the community

Speakers 50-60

Very good speakers of the language. Mostly people who were born and raised in Kormakitis prior to 1974

Speakers -40

Language shift to CyGr is a reality. They are more familiar with CyG than with CyA

Speakers 40-50

A mixed category where the degree of proficiency varies according to exposure to the language, family situation, frequency of contact with other members, frequency of travels back to Kormakitis etc.



TEA of oral skills

- Testing and assessment of oral skills has been (and still is) underrepresented in language assessment
- This reflects a more general situation whereby we tend to give precedence to the written word and much more importance to the ability of someone to write rather than to speak
- Assessing oral competence is a very important aspect of assessment when it comes to endangered languages of oral tradition with limited, recent or no writing tradition
- Very little research on assessing competence in endangered languages
- [Loakes, Moses, Simpson & Wigglesworth 2012 on Walmajarri](#) >>> *test based on non-verbal tasks to assess knowledge of indigenous vocabulary*
- [Borgia 2009 on Onön:dowaga: \(Seneca\) language](#) >>> *test based on verbal and non-verbal tasks to assess oral comprehension & production in conversational settings*



The Tackling Talk project shows that it is possible to move beyond the strong bias which currently exists in language teaching towards reading and text production.

The above research demonstrated a clear need to improve teachers' recognition of the oral language needs of their students and to provide them with ways to develop and assess these needs as part of the current curriculum.

Oliver, Haig & Rochecouste, 2005.

Tackling talk: teaching and assessing oral language. p. i and 2

Assessing competence in Cypriot Arabic: the challenges

What to assess?

Although CyA has occasionally been written in the Greek alphabet and more recently with a variant of the Roman alphabet, it is still to be considered an oral language with very little or recent written tradition, **therefore only assessment of oral skills is possible**

How to assess?

Following Jones & Campbell (2008), we accept that receptive competence is superior to production and therefore we do not expect high levels of active use of the language. In addition, **we cannot use writing or reading to assess oral skills**

We use **non-verbal tasks and allow the use of translanguaging** to evaluate oral comprehension in CyA

Which levels of competence?

We cannot rely on levels of competence as known from standard frameworks: **levels of partial and fragmentary competence** not relevant for standard testing but **relevant for endangered languages** such as knowledge of isolated words, receptive competence, ability to understand oral narratives etc.

Assessing competence in Cypriot Arabic: verbal and non verbal tasks₂

FOCUS		INPUT-OUTPUT	TASK	LEVEL	COMPETENCE
1	Isolated words	Verbal vs Non-verbal	The task consists of listening to a word and choosing the right picture from among a number of different pictures	LEVEL ₀	Does not understand any word
				LEVEL ₁	Understands simple words widely used
				LEVEL ₂	Understands specialized vocabulary in relation to traditional activities
				LEVEL ₃	Understands a wide range of vocabulary
2	Isolated words	Verbal vs Non-verbal	The task consists of listening to a word and choosing the right item activity out of a number of items activities on a picture	LEVEL ₀	Does not understand any word in CA
				LEVEL ₁	Understands simple words widely used
				LEVEL ₂	Understands specialized vocabulary in relation to traditional activities
				LEVEL ₃	Understands a wide range of vocabulary
3	Narrative	Verbal vs Non-verbal	The task consists of listening to a story (Archive of Oral Tradition for CA) and choosing the right order of events from a set of pictures	LEVEL ₀	Fails to sequence any picture correctly
				LEVEL ₁	Partially accomplishes the task by sequencing correctly some pictures
				LEVEL ₂	Successfully accomplishes the task by sequencing all pictures correctly
4	Conversation	Verbal ₁ vs Verbal ₂	The task consists of using translanguaging to provide short answers to questions asked in CA	LEVEL ₀	Fails to understand CA and correctly respond in SG or CG
				LEVEL ₁	Correctly understands CA and responds in SG/CG
5	Conversation	Verbal ₁ vs Verbal ₁	The task consists of using CA to provide short answers to questions asked in CA	LEVEL ₀	Fails to understand and correctly respond in CA
				LEVEL ₁	Correctly understands common sentences and responds in CA
				LEVEL ₂	Correctly understands a wide range of conversation
6	Metalinguistic	Verbal ₁ vs Verbal ₁	The task consists of completing orally metalinguistic tasks such as declining a verb or giving the plural of a noun etc.	LEVEL ₀	Unable to accomplish any metalinguistic task
				LEVEL ₁	Able to accomplish simple metalinguistic tasks, ex. give the plural, form the feminine etc.
				LEVEL ₂	Able to accomplish complex metalinguistic tasks, ex. decline a verb etc.

Activities 1 – Vocabulary

- The test comprises six internally rated tasks that concern exclusively oral comprehension and production. Each internal rating spans 2-4 different levels of achievement. Four of these tasks evaluate oral comprehension, one assesses oral production and another, added at the suggestion of native speakers, tests grammatical/metalinguistic competence
- The first two tasks assess comprehension/knowledge of vocabulary and have an internal rating 0-3, where 0 is the lowest and 3 the highest degree of proficiency. The third activity, related to the comprehension of narrative speech, has an internal rating range of 0-2, and the fourth concerns conversational comprehension and has an internal rating 0-1. The fifth activity concerns oral production and presents an internal rating 0-2. Finally, the sixth activity concerns the accomplishment of grammatical/metalinguistic tasks and presents an internal rating 1-2
- For this activity, we used Microsoft Access with automatic rating of the answers. The speakers hear a single word of CA and must select one of four images as representative of the word. Ten different sets of words (ten words in each set) of variable difficulty were created with the help of the focus group. The correct and incorrect number of answers automatically appear at the end of each set. These lexical sets can be grouped into the following four categories: ● **Category I:** common words, everyday objects and precise terms, e.g., water, door, father, mother ● **Category II:** words for objects, places, buildings commonly found in a village, e.g., church, house, beach ● **Category III:** words for traditional activities or customs (grow, crop, cultivate), traditional gastronomy (pasta in the oven, white beans) ● **Category IV:** words in relation to a wide range of activities and objects.

Activities 1 – Vocabulary

- The lexical sets present an ascending difficulty, with words in Category IV being the most difficult. To determine the degree of lexical difficulty we took into consideration the Swadesh list augmented with additions from the Leipzig–Jakarta list for CA compiled by the MECSY research team in 2013-2014. There was some discussion concerning Category III words (traditional activities and objects), since some members in the focus group felt that only people who had lived in the village would know them. After discussion, however, it appeared that younger speakers were, in fact, familiar with many of these terms, which were emblematic of the Maronite culture (this was especially the case with food terms) as they had learnt them from their parents or grandparents
- Internal rating is as follows: *Level 0* --no competence: the speaker does not know/recognize any or very few words in Category I. *Level 1* -- the speaker knows/recognizes most of the words in Category I and some words in Category II. *Level 2*--the speaker knows most of the words in Categories I and II and possibly some words in Category III. *Level 3*--the speaker knows most of the words in Categories I, II and III and some or most of the words in Category IV.

Ism : Alpina Stefani

Snin : 11



EXIT

Επιλέξτε την σωστή εικόνα (Click στο κουμπί CLICK)

Stanie

Απάντηση

ΥΕ

ΗΧΟΣ



CLICK



CLICK



CLICK



CLICK

1

Θαωρ

Απάντηση

ΥΕ

ΗΧΟΣ



CLICK



CLICK



CLICK



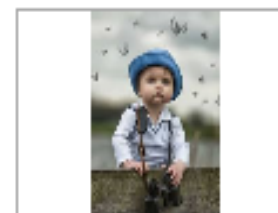
CLICK

1

Mara

Απάντηση

ΗΧΟΣ



ΣΩΣΤΑ

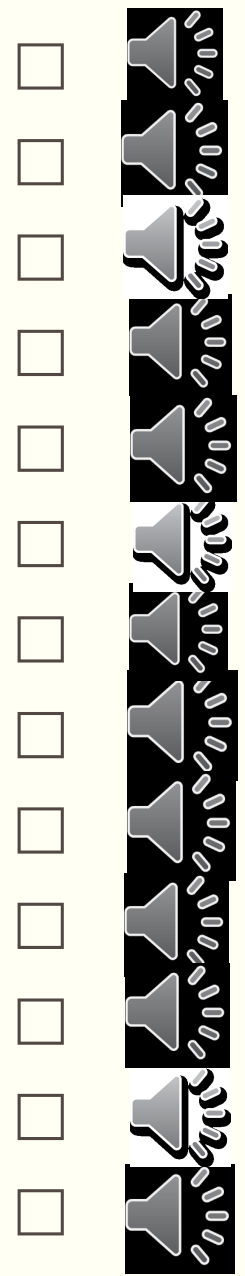
6

ΛΑΘΟΣ

4

Activity 2 – Vocabulary

- In this activity, which also tests knowledge of vocabulary, speakers listen to a word and then are asked to identify the corresponding item or activity on a picture. All items on the picture are consecutively numbered. Five thematic images were produced and presented on Microsoft PowerPoint with the following themes: Picture 1: Animals Picture 2: Places, objects and people of the village Picture 3: Everyday activities Picture 4: Traditional activities I Picture 5: Traditional activities II. Figure 1 below reproduces thematic pictures 1 and 2 created for this activity.
- **Internal rating** for this activity is divided into four levels: *Level 0: no competence*: the speaker is not able to attribute any word to the right item. *Level 1*: the speaker is in a position to identify simple widely used words. *Level 2*: the speaker understands specialized vocabulary in relation to traditional activities. *Level 3*: the speaker understands a wide range of vocabulary.

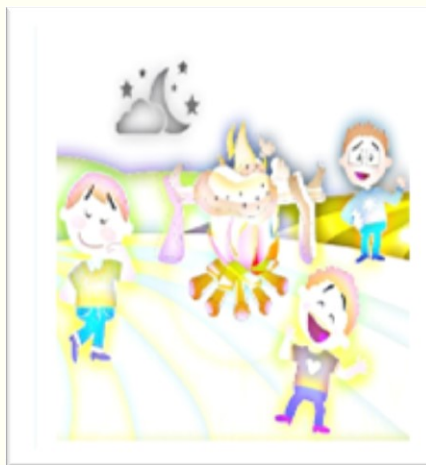


Activity 3 – Narrative comprehension

- The third activity evaluates the ability of speakers to understand short narratives in CA and perform specific non-verbal tasks.
- These narratives were extracted from the Archive of CA Oral Tradition, a corpus of oral texts by CA native speakers collected on MECSY initiative (Karyolemou 2019). The stories were chosen according to: (a) their quality, (b) their brevity, (c) their anecdotal character and funny nature, (d) their indexical nature since they emphasize conducts and behaviours that are deemed characteristic of the Maronite people, and, (e) their cultural value in so far as they foster collective memory and are known to people who were born and raised in Kormakitis prior to 1974.
- All the stories were illustrated by a professional who produced a series of 5-7 pictures for each narrative. The pictures for each narrative are presented in random order and speakers are asked to place them in the correct order after having listened to the story (1-3 times). Rating depends on how many and which stories are correctly sequenced: pictures that correspond to intermediate stages in a story are usually deemed to be harder to interpret than pictures that illustrate opening and closing events. In addition, stories are of varying degrees of difficulty according to whether they are factual, i.e., report on a series of events, or include information about psychological or emotional shifts/developments, which are harder to identify.
- **Internal rating** is as follows:
Level 0: the sequencing provided by the speaker is random and without any relation to the narrative.
Level 1: some pictures are in the right order in some of the factual stories but not in those involving emotional developments.
Level 2: all or most of the pictures in most or all of the stories are correctly sequenced.

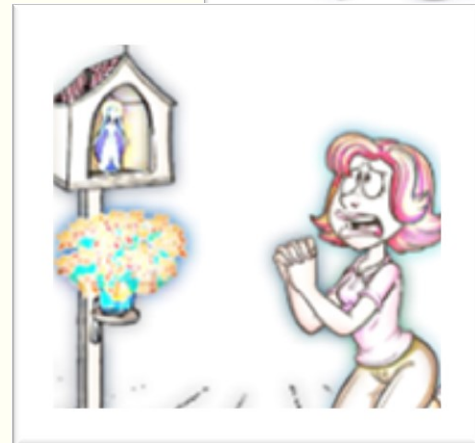
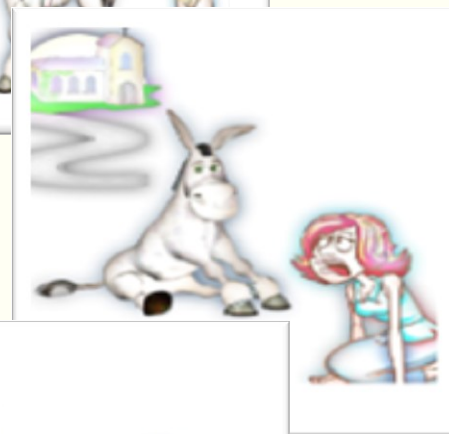
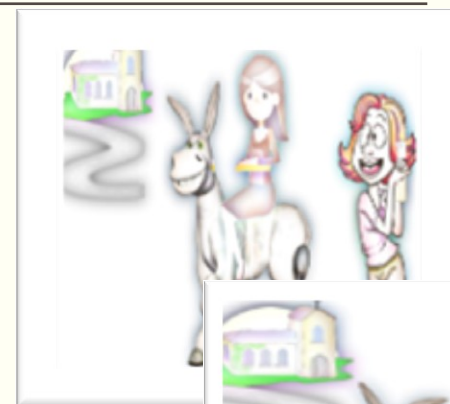
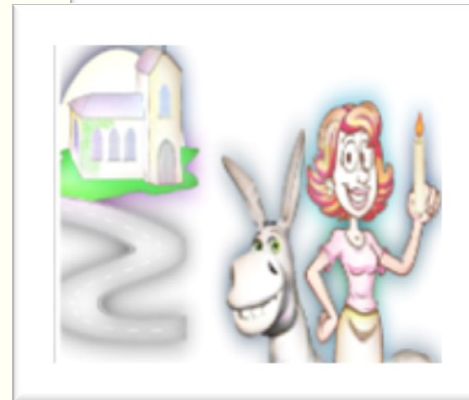
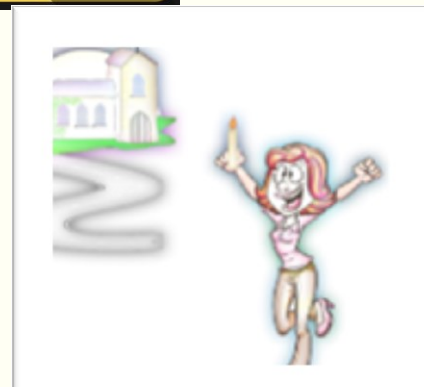
Relating language teaching and testing with language documentation

1



Lli xramín tel jejj

2



L-θavma tel Catra tel Marki

Activity 4 – Oral comprehension

- The fourth activity assesses oral comprehension in the framework of a conversation and requires the presence of a native or fluent CA speaker who acts as facilitator. The CA speaker initiates a series of questions and the subjects are required to provide the appropriate answer-- not necessarily using CA; they are allowed to use (Cy)Gr or both languages (**translanguaging**) as long as their answers are relevant.
- The decision to accept the use of (Cy)Gr or **translanguaging** was based on pragmatic considerations concerning the ability of many speakers to understand but not speak CA. In other words, it was important to acknowledge the use of (Cy)Gr not as a lack of competence but as an indicator of respondents' ability to understand spoken CA, provided that the answers given in (Cy)Gr were relevant to the questions asked in CA. Hence, this activity comprises a verbal input and a verbal output, even if in a different language.
- **Internal rating** consists of two levels: *Level 0*: the speaker does not understand questions in CA in a conversational setting with a native speaker and cannot use (Cy)Gr to respond accurately, and *Level 1*: the speaker does understand conversational questions and is able to use (Cy)Gr to respond accurately.

Activity 5 – Oral production

- The fifth activity concerns the evaluation of oral production and also requires the presence of a native or fluent CA speaker, who acts as facilitator. The CA speaker initiates a series of simple, personal questions such as name, city of residence of the speaker under examination, and then proceeds with other questions of general interest in the form of a conversation; respondents are required to answer using the same language.
- Of course, oral comprehension can also be evaluated through this activity, but the focus here is on the ability of speakers to use CA to reply accurately even if not necessarily correctly. That is, grammatical correctness is here less important than the ability to use whatever language resources in CA a speaker can call upon to reply suitably.
- **Internal rating** consists of three levels: *Level 0*: the speaker is not in a position to comprehend personal questions and provide appropriate answers in CA. *Level 1*: the speaker can use CA to efficiently answer personal questions in CA. *Level 2*: the speaker is in a position to personal answer questions in CA and have a brief conversation.

Types of questions for Activity 4-5 | Conversational setting

Aş pikullullak/pikullulik?	What is your name?
Miten ntvelitt/ntvelitti? Aşka snin int/inti?	When were you born? How old are you?
Ayn trappayt/trappayti?	Where were you raised?
Rux̣t/ruḫti matrasi? Ost ayna taksi ruḫt/ruḫti?	Did you go to school? Until what grade?
Kulla ciştak/ciştik kant il-ḡeca?	Did you always live in the village?
Lik/liḳi ulat? Aşka?	Do you have children? How many?
Mnayn pittix̣ilku?	Where are you from?
Ayna soi int/inti?	Which is your family?
Aşka ḫvat lik/liḳi?	How many siblings do you have?
Lik/liḳi ḫvat ta pic̣iṣu l-ḡeca oksa raḫu kullon mnawnke?	Do you have siblings that live in the occupied area?
Aş şocol pisaw?	What are you in?
etc.	

Activity 6 – Metalinguistic | Metagrammatical awareness

- The sixth activity evaluates a speaker's ability to accomplish orally grammatical tasks and answer questions or accomplish tasks of a metalinguistic character, e.g., is able to conjugate a verb, give the right form for a word when given its structural properties, distinguish the singular or plural of nouns, verbs or adjectives, etc.
- **Internal rating** consists of three levels: *Level 0*: the speaker cannot complete any metalinguistic tasks. *Level 1*: the speaker is able to successfully complete simple grammatical or metalinguistic tasks, e.g., recognizes the masculine or feminine form of an adjective, switches between the plural/singular of a word/adjective, etc.; and finally, *Level 2*: the speaker is in a position to accomplish complex metalinguistic or grammatical tasks, e.g., can conjugate an irregular verb, translate small sentences, etc



Şukran!

