

Diglossia and register variation in Medieval Greek*

Notis Toufexis

University of Cambridge

This article recognizes diglossia as a key phenomenon for the interpretation of the existence of different registers in the late Byzantine period (twelfth-fifteenth centuries). The main characteristics of Byzantine diglossia are outlined and associated with language production during this period. Learned and vernacular registers are approached as extreme poles of a linguistic continuum and linguistic variation as a defining characteristic of a diglossic speech community.

Ever since Karl Krumbacher's *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur* and most definitely since H. G. Beck's *Geschichte der byzantinischen Volksliteratur*¹ the literary production of the Byzantine period² is divided into two relatively distinctive branches: 'normal' literature, composed in some variety of purist Greek, is contrasted with the so-called *Volksliteratur*,³ consisting of a more or less established canon of texts written, in the words of Robert Browning, 'in what appears to be a mixture of developing spoken Greek

* This article, originally presented at the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies (London 2006), represents the outcome of research conducted for the research projects 'A Grammar of Medieval Greek' at the University of Cambridge (2004–present) and 'Formen der Schriftlichkeit in der griechischen Diglossie des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit' (SFB538) at the University of Hamburg (1999–2004). I am grateful to Martin Hinterberger, Brian Joseph, Peter Mackridge, Marc Lauxtermann and Io Manolessou for their suggestions and to David Holton and Marjolijne Janssen for their suggestions and corrections in matters of style.

1 K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der Byzantinischen Litteratur, Von Justinian bis zum Ende des Oströmischen Reiches 527–1453* [Handbuch der Klassischen Altertumswissenschaft 9, 1] (Munich 1897) 385 ff., Appendix with the title *Vulgärgriechische Literatur*; H. G. Beck, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Volksliteratur* [Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft 12, 2, 3] (Munich 1971).

2 In the context of the analysis attempted here I am using the end of the 15th century as a terminus for the end of the Byzantine era. I am fully aware of the arbitrariness of this decision; seen from the perspective of diglossia, however, the socio-cultural changes in the Greek-speaking world during the Ottoman period make such a decision tenable.

3 On the classification and the terminology problems in conjunction with Byzantine Literature see M. Hinterberger, 'How should we define vernacular literature?', paper given at the conference 'Unlocking the potential of texts: Interdisciplinary perspectives on Medieval Greek', Cambridge, 18–19 July 2006 (<<http://www.mml.cam.ac.uk/greek/grammarofmedievalgreek/unlocking/Hinterberger.pdf>> (accessed 31/03/2008).

and static purist Greek'.⁴ Such texts first appear by common acceptance in the twelfth century.⁵

That this observable distinction between purist and less purist language cannot be used as the sole criterion for such a drastic classification of Byzantine literature was obvious to Beck himself. He excludes from his handbook literary texts that are composed by reference to earlier models (namely those of Classical or Late Antiquity),⁶ models that all educated Byzantines felt compelled to follow in their writings;⁷ following this principle, a group of texts, composed within the Byzantine (and post-Byzantine) period is included in his handbook and thus treated as something different, the so-called *Volksliteratur*.⁸

Further to the above, the texts in question share the following common characteristics:

- 1) They are normally transmitted anonymously.
- 2) A considerable chronological gap (of more than one century in many cases) can be observed between their date of composition and the time their transmission in manuscripts begins.
- 3) They do not represent fixed texts: we can observe considerable variation both in the existence of altogether different versions of individual texts and in the wording between individual witnesses transmitting the same text.
- 4) They are composed in a non-standardized, so-called mixed or macaronic language incorporating vernacular and learned elements, without any apparent influence from Medieval Greek dialects (linguistic features that cannot be attributed with certainty to a specific medieval dialect or geographical area).⁹

Taking into consideration the manuals,¹⁰ bibliography¹¹ and lexica¹² covering the Byzantine period, one cannot avoid the impression that the dichotomy between different

4 R. Browning, *Medieval and Modern Greek*, 2nd edn (Cambridge 1983) 9.

5 For a more drastic (and not uncontroversial) approach to the question of the beginning of Modern Greek (language and) literature see M. Jeffreys, 'Modern Greek in the 11th century – or what else should we call it?', *Κάμπος. Cambridge Papers in Modern Greek* 15 (2007) 61–89.

6 With the notable exception of the Aesop and Alexander tradition, among others.

7 Beck, *Geschichte*, XVII.

8 See C. Cupane, 'Wie volkstümlich ist die Byzantinische Volksliteratur?' *BZ* 96 (2003) 577–99 for problems of this traditional classification and the use of the term *Volksliteratur* and D. R. Reinsch, 'Byzanz, Literatur', in *Der Neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike*, XIII, 600.

9 Cupane, *op. cit.*, Hinterberger, 'How should we define?'. See also H. Eideneier, 'Tou Ptochoprodromou', in M. Hinterberger, E. Schiffer (eds.), *Byzantinische Sprachkunst. Studien zur byzantinischen Literatur gewidmet Wolfram Hörandner zum 65. Geburtstag* [Byzantisches Archiv 20] (Berlin and New York 2007) 56–76.

10 Beck's *Geschichte* has its counterpart in H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner* [Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft, 5, 12], 2 vols. (Munich 1978).

11 In the bibliographical supplements of the *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* the 'volkssprachliche Literatur' is treated as a different subject with all relevant publications listed under this separate heading.

12 Vernacular literature of the Byzantine period is covered by E. Kriaras' *Λεξικό της Μεσαιωνικής Ελληνικής Δημόδου γράμματείας (1100–1669)* (Thessaloniki 1968-); for Kriaras' lemmatization practices in his dictionary in relation to the dichotomy discussed here, see his *Prolegomena* in vol. 4 of the lexicon (Thessaloniki 1975) xii–xiv.

‘types’ of literature (or written production in general) is reinforced by the different methodological approaches that are applied to texts with such characteristics. It has been shown convincingly that on closer scrutiny this distinction is based mainly on later preconceptions about Byzantine Literature in general and a conscious or unconscious desire to link such texts to the beginnings of Modern Greek literature.¹³ In the words of Ihor Ševčenko:

We either would measure the degree of an author’s Atticism, in fact, the degree to which he would succeed in living up to the stylistic and linguistic standards established by the Second Sophistics in the early centuries of our era; or we would concentrate on the presence in the writings of a given author of elements perceived as antecedents or early witnesses of the living, that is modern Greek, language. The evaluation of what we saw depended on our ideological preferences. Some of us would behave like learned Byzantines had behaved in the past, and either praise Byzantine authors for their successful mimesis of antique models, or blame them for their failures in the practice of the same mimesis. Others among us would tend to do the opposite. They [...] would express sympathy for those authors who introduced elements of the popular language, however vaguely defined, into their writings, or who would give the impression that they totally espoused that language.¹⁴

In recent literature this distinction is described more in terms of genre, structure and poetics than of content or linguistic form.¹⁵ This article focuses primarily on the origins of the linguistic dimension of this dichotomy. It aims at combining expressed views on Byzantine literature with certain aspects of sociolinguistic research that have not been utilized in the analysis of language and literature of the Byzantine period until now.

That there are considerable linguistic differences among texts written in Greek in the Byzantine period is not surprising at all. Speakers of Greek in Byzantine (and even Early Modern) times distinguished between a sort of ‘proper Greek’, which was considered worth studying and cultivating in writing, and the more humble or plain everyday language, depreciated by the educated and not considered worth learning or cultivating for its own sake.¹⁶ It is a well known fact that written sources from the Greek-speaking

13 In the context both of the national ideologies and the Modern Greek ‘Language Question’ discourse of the nineteenth century: see Hinterberger, ‘How should we define?’, E. Trapp, ‘Learned and vernacular literature in Byzantium: dichotomy or symbiosis?’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 47 (1993) 115–29, and Cupane, ‘Wie volkstümlich’ (esp. fn. 7 with further bibliography on the subject), Reinsch, ‘Byzanz, Literatur’.

14 I. Ševčenko, ‘Additional remarks to the report on levels of style’, *JÖB* 32.1(1982) 220–1.

15 See P. A. Agapitos, ‘SO Debate: Genre, structure and poetics in the Byzantine vernacular romances of love’, *Symbolae Osloenses* 79 (2004) 7–54, and the comments of several specialists on Agapitos’ paper (54–101).

16 This fact is well documented with many authors from different periods and centuries referring to it. A good overview is provided by Hinterberger, ‘How should we define?’, and M. Jeffreys, ‘The silent millennium: thoughts on the evidence for spoken Greek between the last papyri and Cretan drama’, in C. N. Constantinides et al. (eds.), *Φιλέλλην. Studies in Honour of Robert Browning* (Venice 1996) 133–49; see also G. R. Böhlig, *Untersuchungen zum rhetorischen Sprachgebrauch der Byzantiner mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Schriften des Michael Psellos* [Berliner Byzantinistische Arbeiten] (Berlin 1956).

world of the Middle Ages are as a consequence further from the spoken language than contemporary texts of other European languages.¹⁷

The defining difference between European languages and Greek is the diversification of Latin into more than one vernacular and the linguistic ‘distance’ between these vernaculars and Latin.¹⁸ It is therefore possible to speak about ‘Old English’ or ‘Old French’ meaning the early vernaculars of the ninth or eleventh century and contrast them with Latin (still broadly used for all sorts of formal purposes), whereas it is not customary or even feasible to use the term ‘Old Greek’¹⁹ to refer to Greek used during the same period. Because of the revival in the use of classicizing registers of Greek in the ninth and twelfth centuries,²⁰ there is an even older ‘version’ of Greek (verging on Classical Greek) still broadly in use.²¹

The linguistic situation in the Byzantine period, with the use of different varieties of Greek for different purposes is definitely connected²² to a social phenomenon relating to language use within a speech community and the linguistic attitudes or preferences of speakers towards their own native language and other languages or older varieties of their native language which sociolinguistics refers to as ‘diglossia’.

17 All European vernaculars and more especially Romance languages have a phase of ‘interaction’ with Latin, where Latin and the vernacular are used in a ‘mixed’ way and where a ‘diglossia’ situation can be postulated (see W. J. Ong, ‘Orality, literacy, and medieval textualization’, *New Literary History* 16 (1984/5) 1–11; M. S. Batts, ‘The “emergence” of medieval German literature’, *Mosaic* 8 (1974) 135–46; P. Zumthor, ‘Birth of a language and birth of a literature’, *ibid.* 8 (1974) 195–206; R. Wright, *Latin and the Romance Languages in the Early Middle Ages* (London 1991); F. Coulmas, ‘Schriftlichkeit und Diglossie’, in H. Günther and O. Ludwig (eds.), *Schrift und Schriftlichkeit = Writing and its Use: ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch internationaler Forschung* [Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft 10, 1] (Berlin 1994) 739–45). See also C. Ehler, ‘Verschriftung in den altenglischen Urkunden’, in C. Ehler and U. Schaefer (eds.), *Verschriftung und Verschriftlichung. Aspekte des Medienwechsels in verschiedenen Kulturen und Epochen* (Tübingen 1998) 174–88 on the use of both Latin and Old English in Old English acts.

18 Krumbacher (*Geschichte*, II, 787–9) sketches this development right at the beginning of his analysis of Byzantine vernacular literature. See also Coulmas, ‘Schriftlichkeit und Diglossie’ and H. and R. Kahane, ‘Decline and survival of western prestige languages’, *Language* 55 (1979) 183–198.

19 Note however that the term ‘Old Athenian’ is conventionally used to refer to the Modern Greek dialect spoken in Attica in the period up to the end of the nineteenth century. This shows that, if nothing else, use of terminology goes hand in hand with ideologies towards Greek as a linguistic system and the notion of continuity from ancient to modern times.

20 R. Browning, ‘Greek diglossia yesterday and today’, *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 35 (1982) 51.

21 The puristic attitudes of writers associated with the phenomenon of Atticism (see briefly G. Horrocks, *Greek: A History of the Language and its Speakers* (London 1997) 51, 151f. with further bibliography) have significantly contributed to this development.

22 See Browning, ‘Greek diglossia’, 49–68; E. Kriaras, ‘Diglossie des derniers siècles de Byzance: Naissance de la littérature néo-hellénique’ in J. M. Hussey et al. (eds), *Proceedings of the XIIIth International Congress of Byzantine Studies. Oxford, 5–10 September 1966* (London 1967) 283–99, and the response of A. Mirambel, *ibid.* 309–13.

Diglossia as a term for a specific phenomenon was developed by Charles Ferguson in a famous article published 1959.²³ Ferguson describes a sociolinguistic situation found in at least four different and unrelated speech communities. He observes in such diglossic settings a distinct functional differentiation in language use: a typologically more complex variety is used for all formal purposes (education, administration etc.) and is thus superposed upon the spoken varieties of the speech community. Based on this metaphor of superposition Ferguson (and all diglossia-literature after him) uses the terms ‘high’ (H) and ‘low’ (L) to refer to the different varieties or registers used in diglossic communities.

Since 1959 a quite extensive bibliography on the subject of diglossia has evolved, making this sociolinguistic situation a well studied phenomenon in a number of different settings, cultures and languages.²⁴ While Ferguson’s initial definition of diglossia is still broadly in use today, consensus on what exactly the defining characteristics of diglossia are and a more or less generally acceptable theory on diglossia was developed only lately.²⁵

Ferguson included Greek as a prototypical case of diglossia, pointing to the use of *katharevousa* (H) and demotic (L) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; he fails to notice the language situation in Byzantine times, although he includes the more or less similar case of Latin and the Romance languages in his account of historical diglossia cases.²⁶ As early as 1902 Karl Krumbacher used the term ‘Diglossie’ in his essay *Das Problem der neugriechischen Schriftsprache* in order to describe the different use of oral and written registers in contemporary Greece.²⁷ Krumbacher’s essay, clearly in favour of Psycharis’ theses, motivated Georgios Chatzidakis to write his own response, published in 1905 together with his own translation of Krumbacher’s essay, thereby producing one more chapter on the linguistic debate between him and Psycharis.²⁸

It must have been Krumbacher’s publication (quoted as documentation of the Greek case in Ferguson’s 1959 article [p. 326, fn. 4]), among others, that motivated Ferguson to connect similar linguistic situations involving different languages and communities to each

23 C. Ferguson, ‘Diglossia’, *Word* 15 (1959) 325–40.

24 There are, for instance, 2900 entries in the bibliography compiled by M. Fernández, *Diglossia: A Comprehensive Bibliography 1960–1990 and Supplements* (Amsterdam 1993) covering the period 1960–1990.

25 See vol. 157 of the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* (2002), ed. J. Fishman entitled ‘Focus on diglossia’ and especially the focus article by A. Hudson, ‘Outline of a theory of diglossia’, 1–48. One of the best theoretical discussions of diglossia is still F. Britto, *Diglossia: A Study of the Theory with Application to Tamil* (Washington, DC, 1986).

26 Ferguson, ‘Diglossia’ 337.

27 K. Krumbacher, *Das Problem der neugriechischen Schriftsprache: Festrede gehalten in der öffentlichen Sitzung der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu München am 15. Nov. 1902* (Munich 1902). Emmanuil Roidis had already used the term διγλωσσία in 1893 to refer to the nineteenth-century language question in Greece in his defence of demotic (E. Roidis, *Τὰ εἰδωλα: γλωσσικὴ μελέτη* (Athens 1893), passim).

28 G. N. Chatzidakis, *Τὸ πρόβλημα τῆς νεωτέρας γραφομένης Ἑλληνικῆς ὑπὸ Κ. Krumbacher καὶ ἀπάντησις εἰς αὐτὸν ὑπὸ Γεωργίου Ν. Χατζιδάκι* (Athens 1905). See also P. Mackridge, ‘“Sie sprechen wie ein Buch”’: G. N. Hatzidakis (1848–1941) and the defence of Greek diglossia’, *Κάμπος. Cambridge Papers in Modern Greek* 12 (2004) 69–87.

other and try to define diglossia as a generalized category describing a particular case of language use.

The so-called Greek case of diglossia has attracted the interest of researchers in the field of Byzantine and Modern Greek studies; their major contributions to the discussion of the phenomenon can be briefly summarized in the following observations:

- a) The use of demotic and *katharevousa* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can only partially be considered a typical case of diglossia²⁹ and,
- b) The Byzantine situation has some similarities with nineteenth- and twentieth-century diglossia but is very different in some of its key aspects.³⁰

There is little doubt that the sociolinguistic situation relating to the use of Greek in the period from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, which is the main focus of this article, differs considerably from that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This does not necessarily mean, however, that we have to dismiss diglossia as a theoretical framework for research on language use during the medieval period. The approach of sociolinguistics to diglossia as a theoretical concept has changed considerably since Ferguson's initial conceptualization of the phenomenon.³¹ In what follows I will try to outline an overview of diglossia in the late Byzantine period (from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, or in other words from the emergence of *Volksliteratur* until the end of the Byzantine period). My aim is to discuss both language use and the characteristics of vernacular literature (outlined above) in the overall context of Byzantine diglossia. In doing so, I will outline aspects of diglossia as a sociolinguistic phenomenon, which I consider to be most important for the Greek case in the medieval period. In my discussion I do not exclude references to learned registers, since I consider them to be an organic part of the broader diglossic linguistic system of the Byzantine period.

Diglossia is a case of register variation

Diglossia should be understood as a case of register³² variation, correlating with or triggered by occasions of use, and not dialectal variation, correlating with the place of

29 See M. Alexiou, 'Diglossia in Greece', in W. Haas (ed.), *Standard Languages Spoken and Written* (Manchester 1982), 156–92 and especially A. Frangoudaki, 'Comment: Greek societal bilingualism of more than a century', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 157 (2002) 101–7.

30 Hinterberger, 'How should we define?', 2; H. G. Beck, *Das byzantinische Jahrtausend*, 1st edn. (Munich 1978) 147–8.

31 Ferguson's article was initially intended as a starting point and not a full-scale theoretical framework; see C. A. Ferguson, 'Epilogue: Diglossia revisited', *Southwest Journal of Linguistics*, 10 (1991) 214–34, 215–20. See also Hudson, 'Outline of a theory', *passim*.

32 My use of 'register' is not indebted to a particular theoretical framework. I understand register as 'a set of features of speech or writing characteristic of a particular type of linguistic activity or a particular group when engaging in it' (P. H. Matthews, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics* (Oxford and New York 1997), s.v. *register*).

the speaker in the community. This general distinction does not mean that the choice of linguistic code has no social dimension, but that diglossia is primarily defined not as an individual phenomenon at the speaker level but as a social phenomenon at the speech community level.³³ Within the same speech community there exist two main language systems: H(igh) and L(ow). L is used for ‘normal’ everyday and thus mostly oral use, while H is never used as a vernacular (at least not in a casual way) and is reserved for more formal purposes including most, if not all, written registers. H is in other words superposed upon L.³⁴ Francis Britto has formulated this distinction as follows:

Total superposition does not imply that every member of a diglossic community knows H and uses H, but merely that there is no portion of the community which actually knows H and uses H without also knowing L.³⁵

All available texts from medieval times are of course written; therefore we cannot say much about the exact linguistic features of spoken Greek in the period under examination.³⁶ We can however be certain that such a differentiation between H and L was extant, as described above, during the Byzantine period. The official documents of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the fourteenth century,³⁷ for example, are composed in a learned language that employs different means of rhetoric as necessary, in accordance with the function and the recipient of each document or type of document.³⁸ Some vernacular linguistic elements can admittedly be found in few of these documents:³⁹ although their existence (and function) allows us to discern different registers within the documents of the Patriarchate,⁴⁰ the overall language of the Patriarchate documents of the fourteenth century is distinctively learned.⁴¹ That this language has very little to do with the spoken vernacular of the time is absolutely uncontroversial. Equally uncontroversial is the absence of evidence for systematic use of L for formal purposes in the Byzantine period.

33 See also Ferguson, ‘Epilogue: Diglossia revisited’, 222.

34 On the metaphor of superposition of H on L in a diglossic community, see above, p. 207.

35 F. Britto, ‘Tamil diglossia: an interpretation’, *Southwest Journal of Linguistics* 10 (1991) 61. See also Hudson, ‘Outline of a theory’, 5–6.

36 For this problem see I. Manolessou, ‘On historical linguistics, linguistic variation and Medieval Greek’, *BMGs* 32.1 (2008) 63–79.

37 Edited in three volumes: H. Hunger and O. Kresten (eds.), *Das Register des Patriarchats von Konstantinopel, I: Edition und Übersetzung der Urkunden aus den Jahren 1315–1331* [Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 19, 1] (Vienna 1981); C. Cupane et. al. (eds.), *Register des Patriarchats von Konstantinopel, II: Edition und Übersetzung der Urkunden aus den Jahren 1337–1350* [Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 19, 2] (Vienna 1995); J. Koder et. al. (eds.), *Das Register des Patriarchats von Konstantinopel, III: Edition und Übersetzung der Urkunden aus den Jahren 1350–1363* [Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, 19/3] (Vienna 2001).

38 See H. Hunger, ‘Zum Stil und Sprache des Patriarchatregisters von Konstantinopel: Rhetorik im Dienste der orthodoxen Hierarchie’, in H. Hunger (ed.), *Studien zum Patriarchatregister von Konstantinopel I* [Sitzungsberichte der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Klasse 383] (Vienna 1981) 11–60.

39 For the nature of these elements and the context of their use see H. Hunger, *op. cit.* 54–8.

40 Hunger, *op. cit.* 59. For the existence of more than one register within H see below, p. 210.

41 Hunger, *op. cit.* 52–3.

H and L are not single registers but language subsystems

One of the major differences between Modern Greek and Byzantine diglossia already pointed out in the relevant literature (see above, fn. 29 and 30) is that during the Byzantine period more than one variety or register can be identified as having the function of H. This observation is incompatible with some of Ferguson's formulations in his initial description of diglossia which give the impression that in a diglossia situation the diglossic pair H and L consists in each of its parts of a single, more or less homogeneous, register or variety.

This monolithic conception of H and L was clearly a weakness of Ferguson's original concept: in many existing or historical cases of diglossia H and L are represented by more than one variety or register, as is the case for diglossia in the Byzantine period. Britto, who extensively studied diglossia in Tamil and identified several different varieties functioning as H and L,⁴² proposed the term 'diasystem' as 'a collective denomination, or an abstract label, to refer to all varieties sharing certain common features (e.g. the fact that they are not superposed, the fact that they are used for conversation, etc.)'.⁴³

While one does not necessary have to adopt Britto's terminology, such an approach is much more suited for describing the diglossic situation in Byzantine times. It has already been observed that H in Byzantine times incorporates at least two distinct linguistic registers: classicizing Greek and the so-called 'Byzantine Schriftkoine'.⁴⁴ Detailed analysis of the language of learned texts from the Byzantine period has come to the same conclusions.⁴⁵ The exact status of L during the Byzantine period will be clarified in more detail below; it has been convincingly argued that it consists of at least two distinct linguistic registers or varieties.⁴⁶

The most important characteristic of diglossia in the Byzantine period is acquisition

Faced with the problem that in all languages a distance between formal and informal or oral and written language can be observed, and that it is far from obvious how such a gap can be measured, researchers of diglossia have proposed sets of formal criteria for identifying a diglossia situation.⁴⁷ Once examined thoroughly, the particulars of each individual

42 Britto identifies at least four and three varieties of Tamil used as H and L respectively (*Diglossia*, 139 and 132–133).

43 *Ibid.*, 14, 304.

44 Hinterberger, 'How should we define?', 2.

45 See above, fn. 38, on the documents of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the fourteenth century and I. Ševčenko, 'Levels of style in Byzantine prose', *JÖB*, 31.1 (1981) 289–312 on different registers used during the Byzantine period.

46 See Hinterberger, 'How should we define?', 5 ff. and the distinction between 'demotic' and 'vernacular' Greek of the Byzantine period.

47 For a detailed discussion see Hudson, 'Outline of a theory', 9–19.

case of diglossia differ from one another: this is even true for the Greek case of the modern and medieval period, as noted earlier in this paper (see above, p. 208). What makes diglossia cases more homogeneous than they first appear is one characteristic they all have in common: H is never acquired as a native tongue.⁴⁸

That there is a correlation between acquisition and literacy and language use in the Byzantine period has already been pointed out. H. G. Beck, in describing what he considers as main characteristics of Byzantine diglossia, makes a clear distinction between idioms that have to be learned ('die gelehrten, zu erlernenden Idiome') and a more vernacular way of expression that draws from the spoken language ('die aus der gesprochenen Sprache schöpfende mehr volkstümliche Ausdrucksweise').⁴⁹ Martin Hinterberger identifies at least two distinct forms of H (or the learned language, as he calls it), classicizing Greek and the literary Koine, which both 'had to be learned in school'.⁵⁰

From these observations, which can easily be multiplied, we can safely conclude that H in the Byzantine period could only be produced by those who had undergone special education that without doubt went beyond acquiring simple writing and reading skills and included prolonged study of model texts of Classical or Patristic literature.⁵¹ H programmatically draws its typological and morphosyntactic characteristics from older forms of Greek and not from the native language of Greek speakers during this period. As a consequence, it is far from homogeneous, as it incorporates more than one register or variety with different linguistic characteristics in correlation both with the genre of each text and the educational level of each author.

Accepting the criterion of acquisition as the defining characteristic of diglossia is significant: it allows us to formulate a sharper definition of this sociolinguistic phenomenon, better equipped to capture the specifics of use of Greek in Byzantine times. We postulate the existence of diglossia in the Byzantine period not on the basis of the existence of linguistically different registers but because we can safely assume that an elevated, written code with no native speakers is used next to an everyday vernacular.

While the status of H, seen from the perspective of acquisition, poses no specific problems, the same cannot be said for L. Before discussing the status of L in Byzantine times from the perspective of acquisition, we have to clarify our object of analysis and separate this from available data or evidence of this object. Operating under the assumption of the existence of diglossia in Byzantine times, the object of analysis, labelled as

48 *Ibid.*, 23.

49 Beck, *Das byzantinische Jahrtausend*, 148.

50 Hinterberger, 'How can we define?', 2.

51 Cf. the example of the Cypriot Neophytos the Recluse, who apparently acquired reading and writing skills only in adulthood but managed to become a relatively skilled writer by studying sacred and patristic texts (I. Ševčenko, 'Additional remarks', 227–8). For more information on Neophytos's education see K. Galatariotou, *The Making of a Saint: The Life, Times and Sanctification of Neophytos the Recluse* (Cambridge 1991) 153 ff. With proper education a native speaker of a language other than Greek could equally acquire the ability to produce texts in H.

part of our theoretical considerations as L, is the actual spoken language used for everyday communication, the native tongue of speakers of Greek⁵² in the Byzantine period.

If and to what extent this spoken language is accessible or can be reconstructed today is a matter of debate among historical linguists;⁵³ its relationship, in the form of songs and other forms of oral poetry, with vernacular texts of the Byzantine period is a matter of discussion among researchers of the literary production of the period.⁵⁴ What is absolutely certain, however, is that all available evidence for the linguistic shape of this language has come down to us in the form of written texts.

Hinterberger distinguishes, with good reason, between ‘demotic’ and ‘vernacular’ Greek, in the Byzantine period:

I would like to suggest that demotic Greek as a literary language was originally identical with the spoken language and was used exclusively for the purpose of rendering the spoken word or direct speech. Only later on did it gradually develop into the vernacular as presented in most texts dubbed ‘vernacular literature’, a linguistic register used also for other purposes.⁵⁵

‘Demotic’ is used here as a label for linguistic forms (or whole phrases) found in texts for the Byzantine period that ‘do not exist in ancient Greek, but are common to Modern Greek’.⁵⁶ These clearly are related to the spoken language of the period and surface even in written texts of a predominantly H character. In order to produce them, a speaker need not have been subjected to any form of education. In order to write them, though, for whatever reason, he had to be literate. Since literacy could only be acquired through the study of H, interference among these systems in written texts was inevitable.

To sum up the status of L in Byzantine diglossia under the perspective of language acquisition, it is used as a label for *both* the actual spoken language (its dialects etc.) *and* texts written in registers with predominantly vernacular linguistic features (belonging to the so-called *Volksliteratur*). This spoken language is accessible today only in the form of a theoretical abstraction or an approximation, based on available *textual* evidence. Even if its reconstruction is to some extent a matter of speculation, this was the only language

52 Or even speakers of other languages who chose Greek as a medium of communication.

53 On the problem of ‘spoken language’ and historical linguistics in conjunction with Medieval Greek, see Manolessou, ‘On historical linguistics’, *passim*.

54 See E. and M. Jeffreys, ‘The oral background of Byzantine popular poetry’, *Oral Tradition* 1.3 (1986) 504–47 (overview of literature up to this date); H. Eideneier, ‘KAI als Auftakt zur (rhythmischen) Phrase. Zur verbalisierten Pausenmarkierung im Mittel- und Neugriechischen’, *JÖB* 39 (1989) 179–200; D. Holton, ‘Orality in Cretan narrative poetry’, *BMGS* 14 (1990) 186–98 (‘oral residue’); M. Jeffreys, ‘Silent millennium’; H. Eideneier, *Von Rhapsodie zu Rap: Aspekte der griechischen Sprachgeschichte von Homer bis heute* (Tübingen 1999), Agapitos, ‘Genre, structure and poetics’, 53 and *passim*.

55 Hinterberger, ‘How should we define?’, 8–9.

56 *Ibid.*, 5. See also Manolessou, ‘On historical linguistics’, 66 ff., on the principle of uniformitarianism, which allows historical linguists to interpret such forms in a historical perspective.

acquired as a mother tongue by speakers of Greek during the Byzantine period.⁵⁷ H was never acquired in a similar manner.

H and L represent two extreme points of a continuum

Much of what has been said so far makes clear that there exists an opposition between H and L in Byzantine times. It is common practice for researchers of the period to characterize the language of a given text or author as ‘lower’ or ‘higher’ in relationship either to some other text or author or the expected standard of a period or a genre. But still, even if we apply broadly such a more or less impressionistic classification⁵⁸ to texts of the Byzantine period, we are left with several problematic cases:

Furthermore, Atticizing high-style prose by definition uses morphological and syntactic features such as the dual and optative, which clearly have nothing to do with the spoken language. These then are clear-cut cases. But what should we do with texts that avoid features characteristic of the Attic register as well as definitely demotic forms?⁵⁹

Hinterberger’s question relates to the relationship between H and L. Are H and L, seen at least from a linguistic perspective, self-contained subsystems that do not interact with each other? We have already pointed out some aspects of H and L that suggest the contrary; let us now examine evidence provided by the actual linguistic reality of texts of the period under examination.

Research on levels of style in twelfth-century Byzantine historiography⁶⁰ has shown that authors who aspire to use a homogeneous classicizing language are obliged, in certain circumstances, to use contemporary lexical items to refer to the present-day events they are describing; furthermore they do not always succeed in obeying the rules of Classical Greek at all linguistic levels (phonology, morphology, syntax), thus falling back on ‘vulgarisms’, i.e. expressions of their native tongue, and this despite their immaculate education. Even if we ascribe part of such inconsistencies to manuscript copyists rather than the authors themselves we have enough evidence to show that perfect command of

57 This by no means excludes the existence of speakers of non-Greek native languages in Byzantine times. For multilingualism in the Early Byzantine period see Horrocks, *Greek*, 146–9.

58 A tripartite division into ‘high’, ‘middle’ and ‘low’ can be applied to the language of Byzantine texts: ‘a working Byzantinist perceives [levels of style] instinctively, in terms of his everyday practice’ (Ševčenko, ‘Levels of style’, 291). It is not clear to me if Ševčenko’s ‘low’ covers also the so-called *Volksliteratur*. My impression is that it does not and that at least some Byzantine vernacular texts are even lower than Ševčenko’s ‘low’ texts.

59 Hinterberger, ‘How should we define?’, 6.

60 H. Hunger, ‘Stilstufen in der byzantinischen Geschichtsschreibung des 12. Jahrhunderts: Anna Komnene und Michael Glykas’, *Byzantine Studies* 5 (1978) 139–70.

H is an exceptional phenomenon, only achieved by very few;⁶¹ I consider it impossible or extremely difficult for the native speaker to fully suppress his native tongue at all times.⁶² Similarly, everyone who tried to write (for whatever reason)⁶³ in an unadorned, less puristic, linguistic idiom still used elements of the learned language that were not necessarily features of the spoken language.⁶⁴

Many authors in Byzantine times compiled works in different registers,⁶⁵ taking into consideration the expectations of their intended audience and the conventions of the literary genre they were committed to. In several texts we can observe a clear distinction in register between narrative passages and direct speech.⁶⁶ The phenomenon of *metaphrasis*, an adaptation of a text written in a higher register to a lower register (with the opposite direction also attested but less frequently), shows us that speakers of the language were aware of the differences between registers and were capable of adapting a text to a different register in order to meet the needs of a new audience.⁶⁷

There is evidence for the use of different registers as a linguistic device: *Spanos*⁶⁸ is the obvious example, with its combination of vernacular language with liturgical, legal and hagiographical formulae.⁶⁹ Byzantine vernacular texts are transmitted in different versions that show clear preference for ‘higher’ or ‘lower’ linguistic forms.⁷⁰ This evidence can be summed up in the words of Browning as follows:

61 Ševčenko, ‘Levels of style’, 298 ff., refers to the ‘Tyranny of high style’.

62 Peter Hawkins comes to similar conclusions in his research on the use of *katharevousa* and demotic by Greek speakers in the 1970s (‘Greek diglossia and variation theory’, *General Linguistics* 19 (1979) 169–87).

63 Cf. the four patterns of vernacular literature laid out by M. Jeffreys, ‘Silent millennium’, 138–42.

64 On the problems of interpreting such variation from the perspective of historical linguistics see Manolessou, ‘On historical linguistics’, 72 ff.

65 Ševčenko, ‘Levels of style’, 292–4.

66 See Hinterberger, ‘How should we define?’, 11, for the example of Georgios Sphrantzes, and H. Eideneier, ‘Tou Ptochoprodromou’, 64–5 for the example of *Ptochoprodromos* and the *Entertaining Tale of Quadrupeds*.

67 See H. Eideneier, ‘Die Metaphrase als Wechsel der Stilstufe in byzantinischen und postbyzantinischen Texten’, *Göttinger Beiträge zur Byzantinischen und Neugriechischen Philologie* 1 (2001) 27–45; C. Høgel, *Metaphrasis: Redactions and Audiences in Middle Byzantine Hagiography* [KULTs skriftserie, no. 59] (Oslo 1996); I. Ševčenko and H. Hunger, *Des Nikephoros Blemmydes Vasilikos Andrias und dessen Metaphrase von Georgios Galesiotes und Georgios Oinaïotes: ein weiterer Beitrag zum Verständnis der byzantinischen Schrift-Koine* [Wiener Byzantinistische Studien 18] (Vienna 1986); H. Hunger, *Anonyme Metaphrase zu Anna Kommene, Alexias XI–XIII: ein Beitrag zur Erschliessung der byzantinischen Umgangssprache* [Wiener Byzantinistische Studien 15] (Vienna 1981); cf. also J. Davis, ‘The “declassifying” metaphrases of 14th-century Byzantium’, paper given at ‘The Logos conference. Controlling Language: The Greek experience’, King’s College London, University of London, 9–11 September 2004.

68 *Spanos: eine byzantinische Satire in der Form einer Parodie*, ed. H. Eideneier (Berlin 1977).

69 See Ševčenko, ‘Levels of style’, 298 for this and further examples.

70 See M. Hatzigiakoumis, *Τα μεσαιωνικά δημόδη κείμενα: συμβολή στη μελέτη και στην έκδοσή τους* (Athens 1977) 111–15, 122–38, on the manuscript witnesses of *Livistros* and *Rodamne*. Note that the question of responsibility (*ad hoc* copyist or conscious redactor?) for such changes is far from settled.

That Byzantine readers and writers were unusually aware of the possibility of saying the same thing in two ways, in coding the same information in two different codes, is very clear, and that they then went on to use it in complex ways which have a sociological background which we are only beginning to explore.⁷¹

In the face of this evidence we are obliged to consider H and L as the two extreme poles of a continuum: writers and readers (or hearers) of Greek in the Byzantine period were definitely aware of the existence of different registers and the possibilities of utilizing linguistic elements from H and L in correlation with the chosen genre and the expected audience of each individual text.⁷²

Morphosyntactic and lexical variation can appear within the same text⁷³ either unintentionally or as a stylistic device. While it is possible to compile a list of linguistic (phonological, morphological or syntactical) features that are pertinent to only H or L in a specific period in time, it is by no means possible to create a definite dividing line between 'high' and 'low' texts. To do so would be irreconcilable with the actual reality of the texts of the period.

This does not mean that it is impossible to discern differences between H and L registers or different registers within H or L; one needs to identify patterns of use and take into consideration factors such as frequency, distribution and spread. There will also be linguistic or literary features within the given subsystem that show little or no variation, as for instance the extensive use of paratactic structures or the use of Classical Greek vocabulary in a marked way. Each text will then have to be positioned between H and L individually; authors should be considered capable of writing in different registers producing texts which are nevertheless bound to the limitations of the chosen genre and the expectations or specific needs of the envisaged audience.

Diglossia does not necessarily lead to a 'Language Question'

Byzantine diglossia as described so far is neutral and not conflictual, e.g. there is no language question within the society as to the nature of an official language.⁷⁴ Language planning, if we want to assign this role to handbooks on rhetoric and the like from the Byzantine period, is available only for the learned language. I am not aware of any case of an individual author complaining about this linguistic situation⁷⁵ (until the sixteenth or

71 R. Browning's contribution to the discussion of Ševčenko's paper on 'Levels of style', *JÖB* 32.1 (1982) 212 (Proceedings of the XVI International Congress on Byzantine Studies, Vienna 1981).

72 Cf. also A. Bell, 'Language style as audience design', *Language in Society* 13 (1984) 240–50.

73 See E. Trapp, 'Learned and vernacular literature in Byzantium: dichotomy or symbiosis?', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 47 (1993) 115–29 for examples.

74 Beck, *Das byzantinische Jahrtausend*, 147.

75 What, however, needs to be analysed is the exact function of introductory authorial remarks on their chosen register or style and how these relate to the linguistic situation described here.

even the seventeenth century) which was considered natural and an integral part of everyday life. This neutral phase was in fact quite stable for several centuries; it was the need for a ‘national’ language in combination with the new ideologies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that brought about the conflictual phase of Modern Greek diglossia.

Writing in a diglossic community is primarily associated with H

Under ‘writing’ I understand both the aspect of formal education and literacy and the cultivation of registers that in combination with the spread of education leads to language standardization. Only H is standardized. To my knowledge, we have no evidence for L being associated with any level of education prior to the sixteenth century;⁷⁶ we also lack theoretical treatises by authors regarding the use of the non-learned language;⁷⁷ most or all remarks that can be found in Byzantine authors regarding the spoken language show that it was not considered worth cultivating in writing.⁷⁸

The association of literacy,⁷⁹ in the sense of both the incidence of individual literacy skills and the existence of a literary tradition, and diglossia is not an accidental one.⁸⁰ In the case of Byzantine diglossia it must definitely be considered as one of the key factors that did not allow for greater convergence between H and L in Byzantine times. High levels and social stratification of literacy can lead to greater divergence between linguistic varieties, as was the case with the Atticist movements of the ninth and eleventh centuries (see fn. 20).⁸¹

Writing in a diglossia situation like the one described here is associated primarily with the learned language: the possibility that textual conventions developed for higher registers are also used when experimenting or creating lower ones is strong. I would suggest that there is enough evidence that this procedure has taken place: the learned

76 Further research is needed as to the aims and the use of ‘metaphrasis’ and its possible application in educational practices (for bibliography on ‘metaphrasis’ see above, fn. 65).

77 Sofianos’ Grammar, written ca. 1550 and published only in 1874 by É. Legrand, never fulfilled this purpose. For more details on grammatical descriptions of the Greek language written in the period 1500–1800 see I. Manolessou, ‘Μεσαιωνική γραμματική και μεσαιωνικές γραμματικές’, paper given at the conference ‘Neograeca Medii Aevi VI. Γλώσσα, παράδοση και ποιητική’, Yannina, 29 Sept.–2 Oct. 2005.

78 For some examples see Trapp, ‘Learned and vernacular literature’.

79 The English term ‘literacy’ does not capture all aspects concerning the use of script and writing in a diglossic community. I am using literacy here also in the sense covered by the German terms *Schriftlichkeit* and *Verschriftlichung* (for more details see C. Ehler and U. Schaefer (eds.), *Verschriftung und Verschriftlichung: Aspekte des Medienwechsels in verschiedenen Kulturen und Epochen* [ScriptOralia 94] (Tübingen, 1998)): use of writing and its effects on the textualization of a language.

80 Hudson, ‘Outline of a theory’, 24 ff., Coulmas, ‘Schriftlichkeit und Diglossie’.

81 Note however the existence of functional literacy as a further complicating factor in this process as described by R. Browning, ‘Literacy in the Byzantine World’, *BMGS* 4 (1978) 39–54, and especially 51.

opening and closing parts of the *Ptochoprodromica* are included in a 'lower' register text because they are essential parts of the genre of begging poetry, normally cultivated in a higher register.⁸² The poems are an attempt to use a lower register for an existing genre (clearly an innovation), but follow the linguistic conventions of a higher register in their identifying sections.

To sum up, I have argued that the existence of different registers in the (late) Byzantine period is due to the existence of diglossia. We can observe the use of an elevated code, almost exclusively in writing, with no native speakers, that is conventionally labelled 'high'. 'High' consists of more than one register or variety — a fact already recognized by the Byzantines themselves. 'High' is superposed upon 'low', the spoken Greek language of Byzantine times, itself made up of all different dialects used for ordinary communication in the period. 'Low' is only accessible to us today in the form of written registers that consistently or sporadically use linguistic features of the spoken language.

Because 'high' and 'low' occupy the two extreme poles of a continuum and literacy (i.e. the ability to read and write) is associated only with 'higher' varieties, we find a great amount of linguistic variation in written 'low' registers. 'High' registers are not consistent either: highly educated authors cannot avoid using the spoken language in certain situations, while less educated authors are not always able to follow the norms of the learned language, which are different for each genre, audience and period. Because of this, they produce hybrid forms, hypercorrections or even constructions taken directly from their native language.

Byzantine diglossia is distinctively different from Modern Greek diglossia (of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries). There is no 'language question' and no consistent effort from authors to elevate the 'low' registers and resolve the diglossia situation (as was the case with demotic at the end of the nineteenth century). The situation changes after the end of the Byzantine era and the emergence of new socio-cultural circumstances in the Greek-speaking world. With the texts of the so-called Cretan renaissance of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries we find the first conscious efforts to create a highly elaborated literary register that is directly linked with the spoken vernacular. This does not mean that diglossia is resolved, but rather that it takes on a new shape. 'Low' registers become more standardized or consistent in the linguistic features they employ: their relationship with spoken dialects is more evident and probably intentional, something not found in the late Byzantine period. But with this observation we have already opened the subject for a separate article on Early Modern Greek diglossia.

82 I am following here Beck's line of argumentation for the *Ptochoprodromica* (*Geschichte*, 104) formulated in the context of this article.