The Persistence of Dialect and the Diffusion of Koine

Abstract

The diffusion of the Hellenistic Koine during the pre-Christian centuries took place at the expense of ancient dialects. Arcadia is one of the areas, which provides us with a rich documentation for the decline of the old epichoric dialect under the impact of three ‘high’ varieties: (i) general Hellenistic Koine, (ii) Achae-an Doric Koine, and (iii) arguably, that of the North-West Doric Koine. These data provide us with an important testing ground for further development of theories of spatial and social diffusion of language change. I will attempt to explicate more precisely how the writers/speakers moved on the continuum between the ‘high’ and ‘low’ varieties in an increasingly diglossic society, and to offer a more explanatory account of the ‘choice’ between the high and low varieties in terms of ‘domain’ of language/dialect use.

1. Diffusion of Koine – Koineization

Several influential studies devoted to the issue of the persistence of Ancient Greek dialects and to the diffusion of Koine appeared in the ’80s and ’90s (Bubenik 1989; 1993; Brixhe 1993; 1996; 1998). Most recently there has been a renewed interest in these matters in the context of the studies of spatial and social diffusion of language change represented by the programmatic Oxford Handbook of Language Variation and Change (2003). The two important theoretical notions of koineization and adaptation have most recently been discussed by Kerswill (2002, 669 ff.). Essentially, koineization is a contact-induced process through which new varieties of a language are brought about as a result of contact between speakers of mutually understandable varieties – typically dialects of that language. Adaptation refers to a process which starts with the first generation of incomers adapting their speech to the other speakers they encounter. In Historical Linguistics dialect contact and the concomittant koineization are deemed to be one of the main external causes of language change. The epithet external is to be understood as involving social factors (such as population movements and the factors of diglossia). Internal factors, on the other hand, are those which have to do with various structural ‘imbalances’ in the phonology and the grammar of a language and their ‘elimination’ during the language history.

The term Koine was first used to refer to the form of Greek which served as a lingua franca during the Hellenistic and Roman periods (Siegel 1985; Bubenik...
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1993). It was not a new variety but rather a ‘compromise’ Attic-based dialect used for the communication among speakers of other Greek varieties. It was characterized by a certain reduction in morphological categories (such as the elimination of the Attic declension, adoption of the Ionic variant φυλάσσω, and loss of the gerundive) and simplification or decrease in morphological irregularity (such as the immobilization of accent in the plural subparadigms of the type ἐλάβομεν, ἐλάβετε, ἐλάβοσαν). Of fundamental importance was the fact that this Attic-based Koine became the ‘official’ language of the Macedonian empire (see Brixhe & Panayotou 1988) and was widely used in their oriental domains by bilinguals whose native tongues were Late Egyptian, Aramaic and several Anatolian languages. Starting during the last two pre-Christian centuries we are entitled to ascribe several important functions and statuses to the Hellenistic Koine which are typically linked with a ‘standard’ language: the unifying function, the status of prestige and that of frame-of-reference (cf. Bubenik 1989, 9). The first one is obviously the most important – compared with Ancient Greek epichoric dialects, Hellenistic Koine served a much larger speech community. As expected, Hellenistic Koine was not homogeneous over this territory. Hellenistic inscriptions material from the three pre-Christian and the three post-Christian centuries bears evidence to it in that it was realized in a number of regional varieties called conveniently Egyptian (or Ptolemaic) Koine in Egypt, Syro-Palestinian Koine in Middle East and Asia Minor Koine. In the terms of frame-of-reference, Frösen (1974, 165) was right in reminding us that in the assessment of poetic speech Koine was limited only to some functions of written and spoken language while in most cases Classical Attic formed the background of evaluation. However, the fact that Hellenistic Koine was used in scientific writings where Classical Attic was found insufficient in its lexis demonstrates the prestige acquired by Koine in this field.

2. Linguistic characterization of regional inscriptions written during Hellenistic and Greco-Roman times

Now a few words about our primary sources. Greek inscriptions written during the three pre-Christian and the three post-Christian centuries fall into three large categories from the point of view of the use of dialect or Hellenistic Koine by their authors. In many regions the West Greek, Aeolic and Arcado-Cypriot dialects continued to be used until the end of the last pre-Christian century, and at certain places even in the 1st and 2nd post-Christian centuries. As far as the dialect appears in its ‘pure’ form we shall label these documents with D. The opposite category is that of the inscriptions in Hellenistic Koine which appeared at the end of the 4th c. B.C. in various regions of Ancient Greece, and in increasing numbers during the following six centuries. These will be labeled K. Between these two extremes lies the continuum of ‘mixed’ inscriptions showing an increas-
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ing admixture of Koine features. For the purposes of statistical analysis we may specify two ranges along this continuum:

(i) Predominantly dialectal inscriptions with some features of Koine, which can be labeled Dk.

(ii) Predominantly Koine inscriptions with some features of dialect, labeled dK.

It is needless to say that the borderline between these two varieties is tenuous at best and that it will occasionally prove impossible in practical terms to assign a particular inscription to one of the above groups (e.g. in the case of a short inscription containing, say, two dialectal and two Koine features deemed of equal ‘weight’). This group will be labeled DK. The broad group of koineizing dialectal inscriptions presents us with important evidence for the use of dialect with interferences from the socially prestigious Koine, and the use of Koine with interferences from the regional dialect. The former group can be evaluated as a reflex of koineizing habits of native speakers of non-Ionic dialects; the latter group can be evaluated as a reflex of dialectal interference in the speech of diglossic speakers of Hellenistic Koine and one of the Ancient Greek dialects.

Summarily, the period of Macedonian domination produced a thorough going change in the functional structure of Greek. Following and modifying Frössen (1974, 164–5) we can summarize this new state of affairs in terms of the conventional sociolinguistic ‘pyramid’. Its top is occupied by:

(i) Literary standards – Homeric Greek imitated by poets and the Attic language used in the schools of rhetoric.

Below this level there were several levels of the colloquial standard and Hellenistic Koine:

(ii) Colloquial standard – the speech of the ‘privileged’ class in continental Greece, the language of administration, primary education and scientific writing.

(iii) Hellenistic Koine in the traditional meaning of the word – the colloquial ‘substandard’ (= the speech of the privileged classes in the provinces, the speech of the ‘middle’ class in continental Greece, and the language of commerce). In the conquered territories there developed regional varieties of Hellenistic Koine, known under the labels of Ptolemaic Koine, Syro-Palestinian Koine and Asia Minor Koine.

(iv) Provincial substandards – the varieties of Hellenistic Koine in the provinces showing various degrees of interference from epichoric dialects. Here we can mention the three Doric-based Koines: Aegean Doric Koine (whose geographic focus was the island of Rhodes), North West Doric Koine (linked with the political power of the Aetolian league) and Achaean Doric Koine (with features of ‘mild’ Doric dialects, such as those of Corinthia and Sicyonia). Some authors (e.g. Consani (1993, 26) consider the latter two ‘koinai artificielles’, versus the Aegean Doric Koine ‘effectivement parlé’).
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At the bottom of the ‘pyramid’ we can place the level of (v) Receding epichoric dialects (spoken by the ‘low’ class in continental Greece).

In what follows I want to focus on the linguistic situation in the pre-Christian centuries in Arcadia which I handled somewhat sketchily in (1989) in the context of the top-down koineization of all Ancient Greek dialects.

3. The linguistic situation in Arcadia during the 4th–2nd c. B.C.

The linguistic situation in Arcadia during the last three pre-Christian centuries is of a similar complexity as that found in the neighbouring Peloponnesian Achaea. Already in the 4th c. B.C. it is possible to discern the influence of Hellenistic Koine on the epichoric Arcadian dialect.

To provide some examples:

[1] In the law ‘de operibus locandis’ (IG Vii.6) of the 4th c. B.C. we find an Arcadian-Hellenistic hybrid γίνητοι (γίνεσθαι appeared in Ionia in the 5th c. and only as late as around 300 in Attica); Arcadian ἀπυδίει next to Hellenistic δεῖ; hybridized ἐσδόσει (Attic ἐκδόσει) instead of dialectal ἐσδόσις ‘proportioning out’).

[2] In the decree of Tegea of 324 B.C. regarding the return of exiles (IG Vii.p.XXXVI, engraved, however, by a non-Arcadian stone mason) there are the following Hellenisms: the Hellenistic middle voice suffix -ται (in γέγραπται) versus 7 instances of its Arcadian counterpart -τοι (3x) versus Arcadian -οι (19x); Hellenistic subjunctive ἔνθα instead of Arcadian ἢ; doricizing δι’ ἀνάγκας instead of Tegean ἀναγκαυ).

Before the final victory of Hellenistic Koine there had been a period of Achaean influence. From the second part of the 3rd c. onwards, the chief Arcadian cities belonged to the Achaean League and the diffusion of the Achaean Doric forms can be traced very easily because this variety was quite different from the Arcadian dialect. The Achaean Doric Koine had already been strongly influenced by Hellenistic Koine during the previous century. Thus the Hellenistic and West Greek forms, presented in [3], may co-occur in a single document:

[3] The plural forms of the article οἱ, αἱ ~ τοι, ται (the plural form with τ-, found also in Homer, is the original one; ho, with the glottal fricative is by analogy with the singular form ho < *so); the infinitive εἶναι ~ εἶμεν; the preposition πρός ~ ποτί (the Arcado-Cypriot form is πός); the conjunction εἰ ‘if’ may co-occur with Western αἱ, and the particle ἄν with Western κε; there are also instances of hybridized εἰ δέ κα and εἰκ ἄν (in [2]).

Finally, we have to reckon with the influence of the North-West Greek Koine because several of the Arcadian cities were controlled by the Aetolian league:

[4] The two salient Aetolian features, the preposition ἐν governing the accusative, and the thematized dative plural of athematic nouns (of the type φερόντοις instead of...
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φέρομεν) can be observed in some Arcadian documents (IG V ii.510, 511 and 514 from Ager Megalopolitanus, IG V ii.13 from Tegea, and IG V ii.351 and 357 from Stymphalos).

To demonstrate all these influences in a single 3rd c. document we may examine the Law of Stymphalos (IG V ii.357), presented in [5]:

[5] The Law of Stymphalos (IG V ii.357) was written in a linguistic variety that kept all the features which the old Arcadian dialect and Achaean Doric Koine had in common (namely, unraised /ā/, the Gen Pl in -āν, and postradical -i in i-stems). Salient Arcadianisms, however, such as Gen Sg in -αυ and the 3rd Pl in -νσι were replaced by general Doric forms -ας and -ντι, respectively. The features which Achaean Doric and Hellenistic Koine had in common were equally successful in replacing their Arcadian equivalents: -ωι (15x) versus Arcadian -οι (2x); and the infinitive suffix -ειν instead of -εν. Furthermore, here we find evidence for the diffusion of the Aetolian thematized Dat Pl in τοις αἱρεθέντοις ἄνδρεσιν ‘to the elected men’. And lastly, this document contains a number of Attic-Ionic Hellenistic forms such as simplified γίνωμεν, the participle ἀδικοῦμεν (instead of ἀδικεῖτες), infinitive εἶναι (instead of ἦναι) and the preposition πρὸς (instead of Arcadian πός).

4. Statistical survey of the linguistic situation in Arcadia

The linguistic situation in the three pre-Christian and three post-Christian centuries is surveyed statistically in Table 1 (adopted from Bubenik 1989, 164). D refers to both Arcadian and Achaean Doric varieties and K to Hellenistic Koine.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arcadia</th>
<th>3rd</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>1st B.C.</th>
<th>1st A.D.</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>37D</td>
<td>19D</td>
<td>7D</td>
<td>5D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inscriptions</td>
<td>7Dk</td>
<td>12Dk</td>
<td>6Dk</td>
<td>1Dk</td>
<td>1Dk</td>
<td>1Dk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1DK</td>
<td>1DK</td>
<td>1K</td>
<td>6K</td>
<td>20K</td>
<td>6K</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Private      | 9D  | 13D | 3D       | 3D       |     |     |
| inscriptions| 1Dk | 2K  | 2K       | 3K       | 14K | 3K  |

Table 1: Statistical survey of the linguistic situation in Arcadia between 3rd B.C. and 3rd A.D. (after Bubenik 1989, 164)

[6] From the 3rd c. B.C. there are no private Hellenistic inscriptions. The single public one is a short honorary dedication of Mantinea for Antigonus Doson (IG V ii.299, 221 B.C.), which was obviously written in the dialect spoken by the honorand. The proxeny decree of Tegea for the Thessalian Agesandros (IG V ii.11, 240–235 B.C.) was also composed in Hellenistic Koine but with the titles of magistrates in dialect (προστάτας, στρατηγοί).

However, the mass of the public documents – honorary and proxeny decrees, and catalogues in [7] – do not show any traces of the influence of Hellenistic
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Koine. Among them there are 11 documents from Tegea, 8 from Stymphalos, 10 from Lusoi, 2 from Orchomenos and 3 from Aliphera. Some koineisms are found in the documents presented in [7]:

[7] γίνεσθαι in an Arcadian honorary decree of Tegea (IG V.ii.16) and in a proxeny decree of Mantinea, written in the Achaean Doric Koine (IG V.ii.263). The two Arcadian proxeny decrees of Orchomenos (Schw. 666 and 667) display Hellenistic form γραμματεύς (instead of Arcadian γραμματής) and the latter document also contains Hellenistic forms αὐτῶι (instead of αὐτοῖ), καθάπερ ‘just as’ (instead of psilotic κατὰπερ) and ἐγγόνος ‘grandson’ (instead of ἐσγόνος). A proxeny decree of Tegea (IG V.ii.10) written in the Achaean Doric Koine, displays Hellenistic εἶναι (instead of Western ἐμεν) and another proxeny decree of the same city (IG V.ii.17), written in Arcadian, contains Hellenistic εἶναι (instead of Arcadian ἦνα).

In the 2nd c. B.C. we notice an increase in the percentage of Hellenistic inscriptions. Among the 13 Hellenistic public documents three are from Tegea:

[8] a proxeny decree of Tegea for P. Memmius Agathocles (IG V.ii.27), an honorary inscription for Θέων Πολίου (IG V.ii.144), an honorary inscription for C. Asinius Felix (IG V.ii.26 + SEG XI, 1056).

Ten Hellenistic documents are from Megalopolis (and one is from Phigalea). The preference of Megalopolis for Hellenistic Koine appears to parallel the similar situation in recent Hellenistic foundations such as Ptolemais in Cyrenaica (cf. Hodot 1990, 58 quoting Dubois 1986) or Pergamon in the Aeolid caused by the break in the maintenance of the old epichoric dialect. Described in [9] there are two private Hellenistic dedications from Tegea and Megalopolis:

[9] (IG V.ii.118) from Tegea is a dedication for several winners in musical contests (notice Hellenistic αἱ πόλεις ἑορτὰς ἤγοσαν), and from Megalopolis there is a basis of a statue with a (fragmentary emended) formula Ἀσκληπιῶι Ὑγιείαι Θεοῖς πᾶσι καὶ πάσαις (IG V.ii.449).

But as figure 19 D for the public documents in the 2nd c. B.C. indicates, many public documents have been composed in Doric Koine: Tegea (8), Megalopolis (9) and Mantinea (1). More specifically, Figure 19 D in Table 1 refers to documents composed in the Achaean Doric Koine showing traces of the old Arcadian epichoric dialect; among them there are three documents described in [10]–[12]:

[10] In a civic decree of Thisoa (IG V.ii.510) there are Arcado(-Cypriot) forms βόληται and κυριεύουσαι; the n-less plural accusative (in γράψαι δὲ καὶ τὸς ἐπιμελητὰς) could have originated in either Arcadian or Doric; surprising and puzzling is the appearance of a salient Lacoonian form σιός ‘god’ in the concluding phrase ἐς τὸ ἱερὸν το μεγάλο σιοῦ.

[11] A decree of Megalopolis (I Magn 38) of about 200 B.C., i.e. from the period of a temporary revival of the Arcadian League, is appropriately composed in the old Arcadian dialect featuring forms such as ἵν (instead of ἐν), accusative plural in -ος and the 3rd plural in -οι (ποιέσατο).

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[12] The sacred law of Lycosura (IG V.ii.514) was probably copied from an older text in the 2nd c. B.C. and appropriately preserved the Old Arcadian dialect of its original. This is the famous πινάκιον γεγραμμένον έχον τά ἐς τὴν τελετήν which was seen by Pausanias (VIII.37.2) in the 2nd c. A.D. The Old Arcadian dialect of its original is well preserved (κύενσα ‘pregnant’, μάκωσι ‘with the poppies’, πός instead of πρός, Acc Pl τός) but there are also two instances of ἐν co-occurring with Arcadian ἐν:

2 ... μὴ ἐξέστω (IG V.ii.514, Lycosura, 2nd c. B.C.)
3 παρέφητην έχοντας ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τάς
4 Δεσπόινας μὴ χρυσία ὅσα μὴ ἰν ἀνά- τεμα

The source of ἐν could be either Doric or Hellenistic Koine; the infinitive forms with short thematic vowels, μύεσθαι ‘initiate into the mysteries’ (instead of μύη σθαι) and χρέεσθαι ‘consult an oracle’ (instead of χρήσθαι), can be explained similarly.

There are no Arcadian (or arcadianizing) documents from the later centuries and we have no direct way of knowing how long the old epichoric dialect could have survived after the Achaean Doric Koine and Hellenistic Koine had completely ousted the native variety from public and private documents during the period of the 1st pre-Christian and the 1st post-Christian centuries. As Table 1 shows Hellenistic documents and those written in Doric Koine appear to be in balance in the 1st c. B.C. For instance, from Tegea we possess 4 Doric public inscriptions, 3 Doric documents with Hellenisms and 2 purely Hellenistic ones. Similarly, in the 1st post-Christian c. we find these two varieties in balance (actually, the ratio could have been in favor of Doric Koine, since the 6 Hellenistic documents have been dated to the end of the 1st c. or the beginning of the 2nd c.).

After the 1st post-Christian century there had been a sudden break in the use of Doric Koine and only Hellenistic documents came down to us from the 2nd c. The last dialectisms (= general Dorisms) are found

[13] in the formulas of a honorary decree of Megalopolis and Lycosura for the wife of Pompeius Aristocrates (IG V.ii.544) with the doricing self-identifying /ā/ in ἀ πόλις ἀ τῶν Μεγαλοπολιτῶν καὶ ἀ τῶν Λυκουρασίων ... ἀρετᾶς ἑνεκεῖν; and in another honorary decree of Megalopolis (SEG XIV, 347) the Doric 3rd Pl, form ἀνατίθεντι ‘they dedicate’ (instead of Hellenistic ἀνατιθέασι) and στάλαν.

At this point we may remind ourselves of Horrock’s (1997, 4) assessment of the overall situation: “true dialect writing disappeared partly through erosion, but ultimately as a conscious choice in the face of the international prestige of the Koine and the diminished status of the local varieties”.

5. Survival of Ancient dialects and the rise of a pan-Hellenic standard language

In [14] we turned our statistical Table 1 into three consecutive vertical presentations of the co-existence of ‘high’, ‘intermediate’ and ‘low’ varieties reflecting the pervasive socio-cultural changes during the Hellenistic and Roman periods:

[ 321 ]
Co-existence of ‘high’, ‘intermediate’ and ‘low’ varieties during the Hellenistic and Roman periods in Arcadia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4th c. B.C.</th>
<th>2nd c. B.C.</th>
<th>post-Christian centuries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hellenistic Koine</td>
<td>HELLENISTIC KOINE</td>
<td>‘codified’ Attic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARCADIAN</td>
<td>Doric Koinai</td>
<td>‘formal’ HELLENISTIC KOINE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIALECT</td>
<td>receding Arcadian</td>
<td>‘informal’ HELLENISTIC KOINE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(eclipse of Arcadian)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(eclipse of Arcadian)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third diagram captures the state of affairs following the Roman conquest of Greece (in 146 B.C.) when many writers and teachers aspired to revive Classical Attic as a literary medium in place of Hellenistic Koine, and ‘pure’ Attic became a mark of educational and social superiority. In the post-Christian centuries changes in spoken Greek proceeded rapidly, Hellenistic Koine became regionally differentiated, and educated people ended up with a ‘double standard’ (to use Fishman’s 1968 term): the ‘codified’ Attic and the ‘formal’ variety of Hellenistic Koine used in the administration, education and scientific writing. At the center of the continuum between the codified norm of ‘pure’ Attic and the most localized vernacular there were the ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ levels of Hellenistic Koine. In the overseas territories we have to acknowledge the existence of two ‘high’ varieties associated with particular specialist functions and linguistic domains. For instance, in Palmyra the upper ruling class was bilingual in Palmyrene Aramaic and Hellenistic Greek (cf. Bubenik 1989, 271–3). Hellenistic Greek was associated with the administration and the public honoring of her notable citizens and foreign dignitaries, whereas the funerary monuments are almost invariably composed in Palmyrene Aramaic.

To return to the central issue of koineization we can conclude that it was a phenomenon of an extralinguistic nature in the sense that it depended upon a certain degree of movement and interchange in the population. In terms of the ‘spatiality of interaction’ on the home territories the momentum was the formation of more comprehensive alliances, starting with the Ionic confederacy and the confederacy of Delos. During the Hellenistic times and those of the Macedonian domination the formation of various political leagues, called κοινά, such as the Amphictyonic, Aetolian and Achaean κοινόν, was of a paramount importance. These political and social changes and the concurrent establishment of cultural contacts made possible the emergence of larger and more homogeneous speech communities in both continental Greece and newly conquered territories. (In Siegel’s terminology, the transition from ‘primary’ to ‘secondary’ speech communities took place.) The state of affairs of the 6th and 5th c., when each Greek city state formed an individual speech community (and the whole of Greece could be considered a very heterogeneous speech community) was thus radically changed. Various supradialectal formations, conveniently called κοινή, i.e. a common language or dialect, came into being within the realm of these new speech commu-
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6. Conclusion and prospects for further research

Spatial and temporal variation in Ancient Greek has been treated for more than a century by a number of eminent scholars. Their main interest lay in a systematic presentation of phonological, morphological and syntactic features of individual regional dialects in space and time. There has always been a concern about the spatial diffusion of dialectal forms (location of isoglosses, attempts to define a focus of the innovation, transition zones and relic areas, hybridization, status of archaisms, etc.). Contemporary dialectologists and sociolinguists would maintain that the spatial diffusion in linguistic innovations often constitutes only a kind of reflection of three other types of diffusion: from one word to another (lexical diffusion); from one linguistic environment to another (linguistic diffusion); and from one social group to another (sociolinguistic diffusion). As we saw above, in the case of Arcadia, the vicissitudes of the maintenance and ultimate demise of the epichoric dialect in the Arcadian speech community can only be indirectly explicated by means of statistical analysis of its inscriptional corpus. Its meticulous dating elaborated by several generations of epigraphists enables us to trace important social and attitudinal changes in an increasingly diglossic society. An eloquent piece of evidence in this respect is the existence of bilingual and bidialectal inscriptions available from other regions of Hellenistic and Roman Greece (see Bubenik 1989, 290–1). Of particular interest are the renditions of the same document in dialect and Koine, as in the honorary decrees for the same person or two Roman emperors ruling in succession. Three examples from the Doric regions should suffice. In the 3rd c. A.D. in Anaphe Τέλεσων, the son of Φερεκράτης was honored in Aegean Doric Koine and the same community passed another proxeny decree for him in Hellenistic Koine (IG XII. iii.272–3). An honorary inscription for Septimius Severus passed by the city of Itanos is in Cretan Doric, but on the same stone there is another honorary inscription for Severus’ son Caracalla composed in Hellenistic Koine (IC III.20A). Similarly the city of Cyrene issued an honorary decree for Septimius Severus in Koine (SEG XX, 728) while the Emperor Commodus was honored in Cyrenaean Doric (SEG XX, 727).

On the whole, the inscriptional corpus from the Hellenistic and Roman centuries provides us with an important testing ground for further development of the theories of spatial and social diffusion of linguistic changes. As argued above,
the study of the external causes of language change cannot be divorced from the study of the standardizing influence from the high variety exercised on the local varieties in the context of an increasingly diglossic society.

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