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# SEKE, the KKE and the language question

Christina Delistathi
*Brunel University*

*This article presents an overview of SEKE and the KKE's views on the language question between 1918 and 1936. By examining unpublished sources, shifts in the party's views become discernible which cannot be attributed solely to changes in the language debates. The article introduces two innovations: it argues that there is a correlation between political changes within the KKE and transformations in its views on language, and analyses these with reference to ideas on language in the USSR. Studying these views augments our knowledge of a relatively neglected dimension of the language question. Moreover, as the influence of Marxism on some Greek intellectuals increased in this period, its findings can be used to elucidate aspects of literary production.*

## Introduction

Studies on the language question have mostly focused on debates within literary, academic and state circles. As a result, when references are made to the stance of the Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδας (KKE) towards the issue in the period of study (for example, by Mackridge, Beaton, Horrocks),[1] they are rather isolated and brief. A notable exception is Moschonas,[2] who provides an extensive account of the KKE's stance towards the language debates. However, he considers the period 1924–34 as a continuum and errs when claiming that the party's views 'are not, in any case, at variance with the official communist theory, as it would be codified later on the basis of Stalin's writings'.[3] Investigation of the party's publications shows that, as the language question became even more politicized during the 1920s and 1930s, the KKE began to engage in these debates and modified its views, introducing new approaches and dimensions. Studying the ideas on language of the KKE and its predecessor, the Σοσιαλιστικό Εργατικό Κόμμα Ελλάδος (SEKE), on the one hand will enrich our knowledge and understanding

1 For example, P. Mackridge, *Language and National Identity in Greece, 1766–1976* (Oxford 2009) 292, 310.
R. Beaton, *An Introduction to Modern Greek Literature* (Oxford 1999) 320.
G. Horrocks, *Greek: A History of the Language and its Speakers* (Chichester 2010) 459.
2 E. Moschonas, 'Ενας αιώνας Δημοτικισμού', in E. Moschonas (ed.), *Αλ. Πάλλης, Μπρουσός* (Athens 1975) ιγ΄-ρκα΄.
3 Ibid., οβ΄.

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of the language debates; on the other hand, as the influence of Marxism on some Greek intellectuals increased in this period, the study of SEKE and the KKE's stance on the issue can be used to elucidate aspects of contemporary literary production, as it may have influenced the preference and use of demotic by literary authors.

By presenting SEKE and the KKE's ideas on the language question as expressed in their publications, this article introduces new sources of information and lays the foundations for a more extensive and systematic study of these views. The analysis begins with SEKE's formation in 1918 and concludes in 1936, when Metaxas' dictatorial regime banned political parties and their publications. This periodization reflects political changes within SEKE and the KKE, which, it will be argued, can be related to the development of its ideas and positions towards the language question.

## 1918 to 1924

In the early twentieth century, Greece underwent major territorial, politico-ideological and social transformations which prepared the scene for the creation of a Marxist party. Although earlier efforts, mainly by the group known as the Κοινωνιολογική Εταιρεία (1908), to create a mass party representing the interests of labour were unsuccessful, this changed in 1918, when the convergence of several socialist groups and individuals resulted in the formation of SEKE and the Γενική Συνομοσπονδία Εργατών Ελλάδος. These early efforts were further facilitated by the acquisition of part of the region of Macedonia by the Greek state in 1913. The incorporation of the workers and their political organizations formerly outside the Greek borders strengthened the ranks of existing socialist forces. The multi-ethnic socialist organization known as the 'Federation', which was formed in Thessaloniki in 1909,[4] was at that time the most important socialist organization and played a key role in setting up SEKE. Nevertheless, the new party lacked ideological consistency, incorporating an amalgam of divergent views; internal debates concerning its political strategy and organizational model (whether to follow reformism or the Bolshevik model) were often intense. Moreover, the new domestic situation following the Asia Minor Catastrophe of 1922 caused a further restructuring of social forces, transforming the political environment. Amidst the economic and politico-ideological crisis, the initial success of the Russian Revolution stimulated ideological discussions favourable to the Left, although this was not matched by significant electoral gains for SEKE.

Regarding developments in the language question, by 1918 Psycharis had presented the first standardized version of demotic. The advocates of demotic had been brought together in the Demoticist movement and the pedagogical pressure group, Educational Society, had been established by Demoticists in 1910. The language debates had already been influenced by Marxism through Skliros' very influential book *To*

4 The organization's original name was Federación Socialista Laboradera, a Spanish title attributable to the founders, who were Spanish-speaking Jews of Thessaloniki.

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*Κοινωνικόν μας Ζήτημα* (1907), written in simple *katharevousa*. In this publication, Skliros had linked the language question with the 'social question' and the emancipation of the newly-formed working class, and had argued that the roots of the language question were to be found in the Greek social and political system. A different proposition came from the Educational Society, which, instead of fundamental social change, advocated educational reforms to benefit the nation. The society emphasized the introduction of demotic into primary schools, and its bulletin became a forum for demoticist ideas on language and education.[5] The bulletin also acquired a regulatory function by normalizing demotic: it proposed a second model of a standardized demotic which made concessions to *katharevousa*. This model gradually superseded Psycharis' earlier standardized version which, as far as possible, had avoided concessions to *katharevousa*.

Despite the impact of Marxism on the language debates in this period, SEKE's involvement in them was limited. Being in the process of organizational and ideological consolidation, it was not in a position to have a clear and consistent line. More importantly, in the early twentieth century, language debates were largely confined to the bourgeois world and did not engage the majority of the population.[6] It is therefore not difficult to see why SEKE chose to restrict its contribution: it endeavoured to represent the interests of the working class and engaged its meagre resources in issues that concerned that class.

SEKE's limited number of statements on language matters, as evidenced in its programme and in infrequent comments in its publications, shows that it was not indifferent to the language question. In 1919, the party's programme (written in *katharevousa*) called for the introduction of demotic into all levels of education along with other educational demands.[7] Furthermore, as shown by an anonymous article published in *Ριζοσπάστης* in 1921 (the earliest reference to the language question in the newspaper since the party assumed its political control in 1920), SEKE acknowledged the benefits of introducing demotic into education. The author stated, also in simple *katharevousa*, that the party often ought to espouse causes which were not of a socialist nature: even though education in demotic was not a socialist measure, the party welcomed it.[8] Thus, although for SEKE the issue was not apolitical, it was essentially a bourgeois educational matter, peripheral to more pressing demands.

Thus, unlike Skliros, SEKE did not believe that the use of one or the other linguistic variety related to the struggle for socialism. It admired Skliros as 'a great personality among Greek intellectuals' who 'told the truth about language'[9] and, in 1923, it

5 Mackridge, *Language and National Identity*, 266. Psycharis opposed the Society on the basis that its educational focus divided Demoticism.

6 Mackridge, *Language and National Identity*, 292.

7 See *Το ΚΚΕ. Επίσημα κείμενα* I (1918-24) (Athens 1963) 9.

8 'Το κόμμα μας και η Τρίτη Διεθνής', *Ριζοσπάστης*, 14 March 1921. All translations are mine and all references to *Ριζοσπάστης* are from the digitized archives of the series at the National Library of Greece using the search facility of the site; available at http://efimeris.nlg.gr/ns/main.html

9 See 'Γ. Σκληρός', *Ριζοσπάστης*, 19 January 1920.

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advertised his book *Η Φιλολογία του πολέμου και της ειρήνης* and made it available in the Socialist Bookshop (the party's bookshop).[10] Nevertheless, it used both varieties of Modern Greek in its publications: for example, *Σοσιαλιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδος, Αι αρχαί και το πρόγραμμα* (1919) was written in simple *katharevousa*, whereas both *Εργάτης και μηχανές* (1919) and *Το Κομμουνιστικό Μανιφέστο* (1919) were translated into demotic. It seems that translations tended to be rendered in demotic, but further research is needed to verify this assertion. In any case, by choosing to translate the *Communist Manifesto* into demotic, SEKE implicitly acknowledged that this linguistic variety was as appropriate for theoretical discussions and abstract ideas as *katharevousa*. The parallel use of both varieties was not unique to SEKE: in 1919 the Socialist Party's newspaper *Σοσιαλισμός* contained articles both in simple *katharevousa* and in demotic.

Moreover, during the interwar years, both demotic and *katharevousa* underwent changes: the former was simplified, a mix of demotic and *katharevousa* became more frequent[11] and demotic was standardized and codified. Indeed, the translation of the *Communist Manifesto* (1919) was written in a demotic mixed with some morphological features from *katharevousa*: for example, the inflection *–εως* (feminine noun, genitive singular) was used throughout the translation, as in *τάξεως*, instead of the demotic inflection *–ης*.[12] But demotic progressively emerged as the party's favoured form, increasingly used more frequently in its press: Mackridge notes that in the early 1920s most articles in *Ριζοσπάστης* were in *katharevousa* and some in demotic, whereas the editorials gradually moved from *katharevousa* to mixed language and then to demotic.[13]

Aristotelis Sideris, who was at the time in charge of the party's ideological work and prefaced the translation of the *Communist Manifesto*, was critical of what he saw as linguistic extremes used by some Demoticists. Referring to the Demoticist literary author Kostas Hatzopoulos' use of demotic in the latter's translation of the *Communist Manifesto* (1913), Sideris reproached him: 'the translator's fanatical commitment to linguistic homogeneity' often hindered the pleasant reading of the book.[14] In their effort to write in a pure form of demotic, some Demoticists often employed uncommon linguistic forms that Sideris was keen to avoid by mixing the two varieties. In other words, for SEKE, a consistent demotic devoid of any forms of *katharevousa* would not necessarily facilitate comprehension, but might in fact hinder it.

SEKE's decision to use demotic in some of its publications is significant because of the social function of *katharevousa* as the variety usually employed to express complex ideas and meanings. The choice of variety could affect the reception of a work. In 1924,

10 See the advertisement 'Νέες εκδόσεις', *Ριζοσπάστης*, 14 April 1923.

11 A. Frangoudaki, *Η γλώσσα και το έθνος, 1880–1980: Εκατό χρόνια αγώνες για την αυθεντική ελληνική γλώσσα* (Athens 2001) 59.

12 For more details and examples, see C. Delistathi, *Translation and Political Engagement; A Case Study of the Translations of the Communist Manifesto into Greek, 1919–1951,* unpublished PhD thesis, Middlesex University, 2011, 185–6.

13 Mackridge, *Language and National Identity*, 292.

14 A. Sideris, 'Εισαγωγή', in K. Marks and F. Engels, *Το Κομμουνιστικό Μανιφέστο* (Athens 1919) ε΄.

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Giannis Kordatos (who served as SEKE's general secretary from 1920 to 1924 and supported demotic) wrote his book *Η κοινωνική σημασία της Ελληνικής Επαναστάσεως του 1821* (1924) in *katharevousa*. In his epilogue (written in demotic) he explained that, apart from pressure from his publisher who preferred *katharevousa*, he also favoured this version because '[t]he student and scholarly world hasn't yet rid itself of its hollow linguistic tooth – *katharevousa* – and, because of linguistic prejudice, it often doesn't read a useful book written in the language of the people'.[15] Writing in demotic might jeopardize the reception of a work and even result in its rejection as insignificant, because of the preconception that a text written in demotic may not be noteworthy.[16] SEKE's preference for a mixed demotic, as well as the criticism of Hatzopoulos' linguistic choices as extreme, shows the party's determination to reach as wide an audience as possible and its awareness of the importance of language to this end.

## 1924 to 1930

In 1924, SEKE became a Communist Party and changed its name to KKE. After the KKE became a full member of the Comintern, its views on language were modified. In the period between 1925 and 1931, as well as state persecution, it also faced an internal crisis. The process of becoming a Communist Party was far from smooth and was marked by intense internal ideological struggle. The KKE's membership in the Comintern meant that its future became inextricably linked with developments in the USSR and the Comintern itself. For this reason, it is important to consider two very significant developments in the communist movement because they affected the KKE's political identity and its stance vis-à-vis the language question, more evidently from 1930 onwards (see next section). Firstly, in the 1920s, after Stalin became leader of the USSR, the country itself and the parties affiliated to the Comintern experienced fundamental political and ideological alterations, usually referred to as Stalinization, which were not endorsed immediately either by the Bolshevik party or by the Communist Parties in the Comintern. These changes also affected the KKE, which, until 1931, underwent a period of turbulent transformation. From 1926 onwards, several members began to express the view that the party was in the process of becoming bureaucratic and undemocratic, and they formed factions within it that aimed, among other things, to democratize it and to communicate to its membership the full range of views expressed in the Comintern. Opposition to the party's overall direction turned into a sustained political struggle between factions which intensified between 1927 and 1928 and resulted in the departure and expulsion of prominent members such as Pantelis Pouliopoulos, the party's former General Secretary, who would later lead the Trotskyist group Spartakos.

15 Kordatos, cited in Mackridge, *Language and National Identity*, 291.

16 C. Delistathi, 'Socio-political constraints in the production and reception of the *Communist Manifesto*', in J. Boéri and C. Maier (eds), *Compromiso social y traducción/interpretación: Translation/Interpreting and Social Activism* (Granada 2010) 89.

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The second change was a product of these processes and concerned the relationship between the KKE and the rest of the Left. In 1927, the KKE declared its intention to strengthen the party against rival left-wing forces, which it perceived as 'hostile organizations, reactionary at heart, but which are hidden behind the mask of communism and of communist teaching'.[17] In accordance with the Comintern's analysis, articulated in 1928 at its Sixth Congress, that social democracy was the main enemy of communism and that fascism was a form of social democracy, the KKE hardened its line against the social-democratic political formations and referred to them as 'social-fascist'. Later, the Trotskyists were also proclaimed 'Trotskyite-fascists', a charge that was used with varying intensity beyond the period of study. In turn, Trotskyists would retaliate by calling the KKE's leadership 'a pseudo-communist bureaucracy'.[18]

In this period, the KKE showed a more active interest in the language question. The first reason for this shift relates to developments in the language question, which in the mid-1920s became more politicized: on the one hand, the influence of Marxism on Demoticism was strengthened as a number of the Educational Society's supporters (most notably Dimitris Glinos) adopted a Marxist approach to the language question. This was exploited by the opponents of demotic: as Mackridge notes, from 1925 to 1926, when the dictator Pangalos was in power, the government campaigned to associate demotic and Demoticism with communism and Pangalos openly accused the most extreme Demoticists of being communists.[19] This occurred despite the fact that the KKE was critical of Demoticism (see below). On the other hand, the convergence of some Demoticists with Marxism gave an impetus to discussions within the KKE with important consequences for both the KKE and the language debates: it initiated a public discussion in the party's publications and, consequently, assisted in carrying the language debates beyond the confines of the literary, academic and governmental milieus to a broader, non-specialist audience. At the time of the Educational Society's split in 1927, *Ριζοσπάστης* published several articles on the language question, in effect enlarging the audience of the debates and the number of potential participants who engaged in them.[20] In 1929 the Educational Society collapsed due to internal differences.

The second reason for the change in the KKE's stance concerns transformations in the social role of demotic and *katharevousa*. The polarization between Marxists and non-Marxists within the Demoticist movement, the intensified politicization of the issue ensuing from its real and imaginary links with communism and the persecution of communists, who were more likely to use demotic, by the Greek state (particularly from 1929 with the Idionymo law), may have contributed to what Frangoudaki calls a process of

17 'Αι αποφάσεις του Γ' Τακτικού Συνεδρίου του κόμματος', *Ριζοσπάστης*, 16 April 1927.

18 Maximos, quoted in Milios, 'Ο Μαρξισμός στο μεσοπόλεμο και ο Σεραφείμ Μάξιμος', *Θέσεις* 26 (1989), electronic edition: http://www.theseis.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=242&Itemid=29 [accessed 24/05/12].

19 Mackridge, *Language and National Identity*, 290.

20 See the series of articles titled 'Απ' αφορμή μιας διακήρυξης του Εκπαιδευτικού Ομίλου', *Ριζοσπάστης*, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30 and 31 August 1927.

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change in the social function of both forms in the interwar years: preference for *katharevousa* or demotic gradually began to be associated in people's minds with ideological positions and social and political beliefs,[21] a process that was to be completed at the end of the Civil War. Thus, it is easy to see why the KKE endeavoured to exclude *katharevousa* from its publications in this period.

The third reason relates to educational concerns. The KKE's need to instruct its members in Marxist ideas was pressing; to this end it set up the Propaganda and Statistics Bureau (1925) and organized regular political lessons.[22] The use of language in a way that facilitated understanding within sections of the population less likely to have an education and know *katharevousa* was important in the venture to disseminate Marxist theory and popularize the party's ideas. As stated in the party's Educational Programme, the learning needs of workers and peasants should be addressed through the simplest and most accessible analyses,[23] and the choice of linguistic form was central to this endeavour. Indeed, between 1925 and 1929, the KKE began to use demotic more frequently in its publications and from 1927 onwards its official party texts were written in demotic.[24] The variety of demotic used in *Ριζοσπάστης* in the late 1920s was closer to the Educational Society's demotic than to Psycharis' version.[25] Thus, practical educational requirements and the further politicization of the language question, as well as the broadening audience of the debates and the changing social functions of demotic and *katharevousa,* forced the KKE to select demotic as its preferred language of publication and so to adopt an unequivocal position to the language question. In the meantime, as regards the overall intellectual production, in the interwar years demotic made significant inroads into scholarly works as some writings in science, philosophy, literary criticism, sociology and psychology were written in demotic,[26] elevating its status to a variety appropriate for academic discourse.

For the KKE, language was now explicitly recognized as an instrument that facilitated communication between the party and its audience. In 1926, the columnist in the first article to appear in *Ριζοσπάστης* specifically on the language question, praised the party's 'serious effort to write [the newspaper] in demotic', an effort which did not originate from the fact that 'we, the workers, are supposedly Demoticists like the pedants of the Educational Society', or 'because we believe that the world will change if we accept Mr Psycharis' grammatical gospel'; rather, it was asserted that, 'we write in demotic so that [others] can understand what we want to say and we prefer to read demotic so we can understand what we read. That's all'.[27] Thus, the KKE did not side with Demoticism and disapproved of both of the prevalent views within Demoticism, namely Psycharis'

21 Frangoudaki, *Η γλώσσα και το έθνος,* 61.

22 'Το μορφωτικό πρόγραμμα του κόμματος', *Ριζοσπάστης*, 11 January 1925.

23 Ibid.

24 Mackridge, *Language and National Identity*, 291.

25 Ibid., 292.

26 Frangoudaki, *Η γλώσσα και το έθνος,* 62.

27 'Η δημοτική', *Ριζοσπάστης*, 31 August 1926.

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rigid prescriptiveness and the Society's version of demotic which was more tolerant of *katharevousa*. This is very important because, firstly, as discussed above, Demoticists were accused of being communists, particularly from 1925 onwards, despite the fact that the KKE had dissociated itself from them. Secondly, despite the KKE's criticism of the Educational Society's version of demotic, the party used a variety approximating that of the Society, as mentioned above; thus its criticism was politically motivated.

Moreover, unlike the Demoticists (both Psycharists and the followers of the Educational Society) who preferred demotic for its nation-unifying potential, the KKE favoured this variety because of its function as an effective communicative channel: it facilitated the dissemination of Marxist ideas to those unlikely to know *katharevousa*. In turn, the audience could communicate with a party that spoke its language. This view, which was not generated by a particular theory of language, was closer to Skliros' analysis, which postulated that the awakening of the working class would be facilitated by the employment of demotic.[28]

In contrast to the Educational Society's emphasis on the reform of primary education, the KKE argued that 'demoticism is remote from the plight of the masses', and called for a struggle against the social system that prevented the education of the poor,[29] for the reform of the entire educational system, an increase in government spending to end the chronic underfunding of education, and the improvement of teachers' remuneration, training and working conditions.[30] Although the KKE viewed the language reform favourably, it opposed the Society's limited agenda. It argued that without far-reaching social change, language reform would not improve education or increase literacy levels among the population. Thus, the KKE rejected the Demoticists' idea that the resolution of the language question would cure social problems such as illiteracy.

The KKE's perspective inevitably determined its position towards developments within the Demoticist movement. After the split of the Educational Society in 1927, it welcomed the Society's new Marxist orientation, but remained critical of its insistence on educational reform. According to *Ριζοσπάστης*, after the split the Society consisted of democrats, socialist sympathizers and Marxist teachers and the paper considered a crucial task to be that of initiating a critique of the Society's reformist principles. Nevertheless, in 1928, the KKE's journal *Νέα Επιθεώρηση* declared Demoticism to be 'an important weapon' for the working class.[31] Given that the Society had split, this may indicate that the columnist referred to Marxist Demoticists, now crediting them with a pivotal role in the class struggle, and that the KKE's views on language matters were beginning to change; in fact they did indeed change, more clearly so in the 1930s.

28 For more details see the series of articles titled 'Απ' αφορμή μιας διακήρυξης του Εκπαιδευτικού Ομίλου', *Ριζοσπάστης*, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30 and 31 August 1927.

29 'Δημοτικισμός και μπουρζουαζία', *Ριζοσπάστης*, 18 January 1925.

30 Pouliopoulos cited in G. Kordatos, *Δημοτικισμός και Λογιωτατισμός* (Athens 1974 [1st edition 1927]) 173–5.

31 Anon., 'Επίλογοι: Δημοτικισμός καί αντίδραση', *Νέα Επιθεώρηση* (Α΄ περίοδος), 1928, no. 10, 318.

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## 1930 to 1936

In the 1930s, the KKE's views on the language question were again modified due to transformations within the Demoticist movement and the party. In this period, the political associations implied by the use of one or the other linguistic form (a process under way since the 1920s) were reconfirmed. Writing in demotic tended to be understood as a sign of left-wing political allegiance, whereas adherence to *katharevousa* was seen as an indicator of political conservatism, increasingly equated with the political Right and the preservation of the existing status quo.[32]

The party's influence on Greek politics increased in the 1930s: between 1931 and 1932 its membership rose by 120%, by 1934 it had increased by 150% (within one and a half years), and between 1935 and 1936 it more than doubled.[33] The repression of left-wing activists and trade unionists, particularly after the implementation of the Idionymo Law of 1929, was perhaps the most decisive factor in labour radicalization and in increasing recruitment to the communist ranks.[34] The party's enhanced appeal was also reflected in electoral votes: in the 1935 elections the KKE took almost 10% of the vote.[35]

In the meantime, in 1931, the Comintern had appointed the KKE's leadership, headed by Nikos Zachariadis, thus ending the internal strife, aligning the party fully with the Comintern and its new policies, and marking its full Stalinization. In line with these changes, in January 1934 the KKE made its new analysis official: a proletarian revolution in Greece would be preceded by an intermediate stage, a 'bourgeois-democratic' revolution. To substantiate this change, it offered an analysis of Greek society that may be summarized as follows: Greece was a capitalist society with 'important feudal remnants',[36] where the development of the forces of production was at a low level; circumstances which rendered the conditions for a socialist revolution 'unripe'. This analysis required that, before the struggle for socialism, the Communist Party support its national bourgeoisie in its quest for democracy.[37] Along these lines, a bourgeois-democratic revolution was necessary in order to wipe out the feudal structures and develop the forces of production necessary for a socialist revolution.

As mentioned above, by this time the relationship between the KKE and other Marxist-oriented organizations had already changed, with the former branding its adversaries as agents of the bourgeoisie. However, the social-democratic forces did not threaten the KKE's position. As Mavrogordatos notes, these groups failed to create a lasting

32 Beaton, *An Introduction*, 321.

33 G. Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic: Social Coalitions and Party Strategies in Greece, 1922–1936* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1983) 149.

34 Ibid., 146.

35 R. Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece* (Cambridge 2002) 113.

36 'Απόφαση για την κατάσταση της Ελλάδας και τα καθήκοντα του κόμματος', *Ριζοσπάστης*, 21 January 1934.

37 Ibid.

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political party despite their influence within the labour movement.[38] Instead, the influence of Trotskyism was much more significant and threatening for the KKE. The most important organizations on the Left that contested the KKE's interpretation of Marxism and supported the International Left Opposition were the Αρχείον του Μαρξισμού and Σπάρτακος, the former being the larger of the two. They aroused the KKE's hostility because of their critique of Stalinism (mainly Spartakos), but also for practical reasons, because they challenged the KKE's position within the labour movement (mainly the Archive). As Kardasis notes, between 1929 and 1934 Trotskyism had considerable influence and between 1926 and 1928 the Archive's membership was larger than that of the KKE.[39] For these reasons, the KKE's most ruthless polemic was reserved for the Trotskyists.

In this context of the transformation of the social role of demotic and *katharevousa*, of the Stalinization of the KKE, and of the ideological struggle both against bourgeois ideology and against the Marxist-oriented Left, the KKE began to take a more active part in language debates. A combination of the clearer political associations of demotic with the Left, and, by this time, the KKE's familiarity with the prevalent views on language in the USSR (see below) explains its increased attention to language matters. Changes were evident in *Ριζοσπάστης*, which, as Mackridge states, was written exclusively in demotic from 1932 onwards.[40] The KKE sought to engage its readership in the language debates. In 1934, its cultural journal *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι* conducted a survey requesting readers to respond to a questionnaire aimed at exploring their views on the language question. They could comment on issues such as why the language question had not been resolved and when and how it could be settled.[41] Now demotic was explicitly related to class struggle: 'the struggle for demotic is indivisible from the overall struggle of the proletariat and interrelated with it'; although not the focus of the struggle, it was nevertheless extremely important.[42] Whereas previously the party's approach to the language question was primarily pragmatic, in other words that use of demotic would help it reach a wider audience, now it became a contested issue in the class struggle in its own right.

This new approach to language matters was not unique to Greece. In the 1930s, a comparable change of outlook occurred within the Norwegian Labour Party (Norway also had a dual linguistic code). Similarly to the KKE, the Norwegian Labour Party reinterpreted class struggle 'to include not only the economic but also the linguistic liberation

38 Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, 148.

39 V. Kardasis, 'Η περιπέτεια του ελληνικού Τροτσκισμού', *Ελευθεροτυπία*, 26 July 2002.

40 Mackridge, *Language and National Identity*, 292.

41 See 'Γιατί δεν λύνεται το γλωσσικό ζήτημα;', *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι*, 1934, no. 4, 158; 'Η έρευνά μας για το γλωσσικό ζήτημα', *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι*, 1934, no. 6, 223–5; 'Η έρευνά μας για το γλωσσικό ζήτημα', *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι*, 1934, no. 8, 307; 'Η έρευνά μας για το γλωσσικό ζήτημα', *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι*, 1934, no. 11, 451–2.

42 F.P. [= Foula Porfyrogeni?] and Trapezountios, 'Γύρω στο γλωσσικό ζήτημα', *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι* (περίοδος Γ΄) 4 (1935), no. 3–5, 95–8.

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of the common people'.[43] The language ideal was no longer the language of the educated elite or 'nationalistic Norwegian', but 'folk speech'.[44] A parallel shift of focus towards the folk language occurred within the KKE, which now advocated that true demotic was 'the language of the people' as spoken by peasants and workers.

Moreover, both parties formulated their ideas on language with reference to developments within the USSR. This happened regardless of the fact that, as Haugen notes, the Norwegian Labour Party had already cast off its political ties with Moscow.[45] Despite this dissociation, when Hans Vogt, a party linguist who later became professor of Romance languages and General Linguistics, wrote the pamphlet *Language Strife and Class Struggle* in 1932, he cited Stalin extensively and praised the Soviet Union for its work on national languages.[46] Similarly, the KKE referred to the prevalent theory of language in the USSR, namely the Japhetic theory, to formulate its own views and for this reason a study of the KKE's ideas on language in this period should also consider this theory. As will be shown below, it is incorrect to claim, as Beaton does,[47] that no distinct theory of language was developed or articulated during the course of the language debates.

From the late 1920s, Nikolai Marr (1865-1934) was the USSR's foremost linguist. His Japhetic theory or 'New Theory of Language', which is now discredited, became the official state theory until 1950. Marr formulated his hypotheses about the origins of languages and the relationship between language and society. He rejected the genealogical classification of languages and considered the concept of language family as a racial account.[48] In his view, language was a feature of the superstructure, reflecting, directly or indirectly, the characteristics of the economic basis of a society;[49] different stages in the development of a socio-economic system generate different stages in the development of a language.[50] Moreover, Marr argued that the class structure of a particular society controls the linguistic structures and typological features of a language, among other factors, so that a change in the class stratification will result in language change.[51] As language mirrors class differentiations and antagonisms, there can be no single unified language in a society. Instead, a unified language can exist only in a classless society.[52]

43 E. Haugen, *Language Conflict and Language Planning: The Case of Modern Norwegian* (Cambridge, MA 1966) 104.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid., 106.
46 Ibid., 116.
47 Beaton, *An Introduction,* 346.
48 M. Lähteenmäki, 'Nikolai Marr and the idea of a unified language', *Language & Communication* 26 (2006) 285–95 [286].
49 Ibid., 286
50 Ibid., 290.
51 Ibid., 286
52 Ibid., 290.

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Based on this hypothesis, Marr developed the concept of 'class languages' and postulated that

> a national, all-national language does not exist, but there is a class language – and languages of one and the same class in different countries, given an identity of the social structure, reveal more typological relationships to each other than languages of different classes in one and the same country, one and the same nation.[53]

The KKE was acquainted with Marr's views. In an article in *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι*, the columnist stated his intention to discuss the language question with reference to Marr's ideas and opined that 'as Marr teaches us, in contemporary class societies there is and can be no single common national language'; not only is there no common national Greek language, but there are several Greek languages.[54] According to Marr, he continued, Pontic is not a dialect, but a language of groups of people whose economic and, therefore, cultural development is arrested.[55] Like Marr, he acknowledged that language is a superstructural feature and proposed that each group use and develop its own mother tongue.[56]

Echoing Marr, Skytalis, writing in the same journal, stated that language is a product of the actions of social beings at the point of production.[57] His opinion that Greek workers and peasants were unable to understand either the *katharevousa* or the demotic of the Greek bourgeoisie is evocative of Marr's concept of 'class language'. Skytalis applied Marr's analysis of the relationship between language and society to argue that 'diglossia' or 'polyglossia' is the reflection of class antagonisms on the superstructure and particularly on language.[58] Three factors controlled the 'social causes' of the language situation in Greece: a) the arrested development of Greek capitalism, b) the feudal remnants in Greek society and c) the impact of these remnants 'on the socio-ideological superstructure and, therefore, in the evolution of language, literature, art, science, etc.'[59] The dual linguistic situation in Greece could only be resolved through the proletariat's involvement and as part of its broader struggle.[60] The discussion of the language question with reference to Marr's analysis is very important because for the first time a theory of language is introduced into the debate and because it attempts to account for the linguistic situation in Greece with reference to this theory.

53 N.Ia. Marr 'Pochemu tak trudno stat' lingvistom-teoretikom?' in: N.Ia. Marr (ed.), *Iazykovedenie I materialism* (Leningrad 1929) 1–56 [33]. cited in Lähteenmäki 'Nikolai Marr', 290.

54 E. I. Trapezountios, 'Η έρευνά μας για το γλωσσικό ζήτημα', *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι*, 1934, no. 8, 307.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 P. G. Skytalis, 'Γύρω στο γλωσσικό ζήτημα', *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι* (περίοδος Γ') 4 (1935), no. 6, 130–3 [130].

58 Ibid., 131.

59 Ibid., 130.

60 Ibid., 131. Glinos develops this thesis in a series of articles titled 'Η αστική δημοκρατία και τα προβλήματα του πολιτισμού στην Ελλάδα', *Ριζοσπάστης*, 11, 14, 18 and 22 March 1934.

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During this period, the KKE's stance towards demotic as the language of scholarly works and abstract thought was contradictory. Whereas in 1934 Glinos contended that demotic had proved to be 'mature enough to express even the most abstract meanings',[61] a year later *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι* argued that 'Demotic has not been developed in theoretical and abstract subjects'.[62] Nevertheless, both agreed on the necessity to cultivate demotic. To this end, Glinos urged his readers to study the spoken language and Demoticist literature:

> The two sources that will give us the linguistic form on which we'll crystallize our socialist civilization will be the *common* [emphasis in the original] language spoken by the Greek workers and peasants and the *literary* language which, based on the people's oral speech and folk songs, was shaped by Solomos, through to Psycharis and Varnalis.[63]

As discussed in the previous section, in the late 1920s the KKE had adopted in its publications a version of demotic closer to that of the Educational Society. Now Glinos rejected that variety in favour of the oral language of the peasants and workers who constituted the vague category of 'the people'. Like Glinos, Skytalis argued in the party's publications that 'the current "demotic" is more an artificial, invented and schematic language than the living language of the people'.[64]

References to the culture of rural populations can be found both in discussions within Greece and in the contemporary USSR. For the Demoticists in Greece these discussions concerned the relationship between national identity and folk traditions (it is worth remembering that for them modern Greek culture was the continuation of ancient Greek culture). In support of socialist realism, which in 1932 became the official method of artistic composition in the USSR, Maxim Gorky evaluated the acceptability of bourgeois works of literature in 1934: they were less valuable in comparison to folk literature, which expressed the authentic experience of the people.[65] Similarly, for Glinos, the folk traditions expressed the real experiences and feelings of the Greek 'people'. Although it is unclear if his preference for folk songs predates discussions in the USSR, Dounia argues that Gorky's stance was known to KKE intellectuals such as Glinos and became the party's official view from 1934,[66] at the time that Glinos was writing about 'the people' and their culture. Glinos' preference (similar to that of the Demoticists) for the language of the old folk songs of rural populations, instead of that of the contemporary *rebetika* of the urban poor, may be explained by the KKE's perception of the *rebetika* musicians as social outcasts, who did not conform to its idealized image of the

61 D. Glinos, 'Η αστική δημοκρατία και τα προβλήματα του πολιτισμού στην Ελλάδα', *Ριζοσπάστης*, 14 March 1934.

62 F. P. and Trapezountios, 'Γύρω στο γλωσσικό ζήτημα', 98.

63 D. Glinos, 'Το γλωσσικό ζήτημα', *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι*, 1934, no. 5, 186–8 [187].

64 Skytalis, 'Γύρω στο γλωσσικό ζήτημα', 130.

65 C. Dounia, *Λογοτεχνία και πολιτική: τα περιοδικά της αριστεράς στο Μεσοπόλεμο* (Athens 1999) 416.

66 Ibid., 420.

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proletariat. By contrast, it could be argued that the folk songs were created by hard-working and uncorrupted people. Debates in the USSR reinforced this preference. Consequently, the 'language of the people', which expressed such traditions, had particular significance for the KKE. As a self-proclaimed representative of the interests of the Greek people, it could only adopt the variety of demotic that it assumed they spoke.

The increasing association of demotic with the political Left, and of *katharevousa* with the Right, was also employed as a weapon in the ideological battle within the Left. Moschonas draws our attention to the internal ideological battle within the KKE in the late 1920s, but views the party's shift in the 1930s to using demotic exclusively merely as a defence against the Trotskyists.[67] For example, Glinos opined that contrary to 'pseudo-socialists' like Aristotelis Sideris (the former leading member of SEKE who remained a reformist) who wrote in *katharevousa*, the 'vanguard of the proletariat', organized in the KKE, had settled the language question by using demotic in all party publications and functions.[68] This indicates that for the KKE the use of demotic had become a marker of politico-ideological differentiation, separating not only the Right from the Left, but also the real Marxists from the bogus ones.

Marr's ideas continued to shape the KKE's approach to language matters until the early 1950s. In 1950, Stalin published his *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics*. In this he rejected the class character of language, pointed to the unity of national languages and denounced Marr and his theory. Marr was soon also denounced in Greece: in 1951 Petros Rousos, from the KKE's Politburo, introduced Stalin's new arguments about language and criticized Marr.[69]

## Conclusion

This article has addressed a relatively neglected dimension in the study of the language question, namely SEKE's and the KKE's ideas on the issue, and points to unpublished sources for further research. It argues that the party's different approaches to the language question can to some extent be related to developments within the language debates, but more importantly, also coincide with and reflect important changes in its political character. During the initial period of SEKE's formation, the language question was viewed as a bourgeois educational issue. Subsequently, when SEKE became a Communist Party and its political orientation was consolidated, the resolution of the language question was seen as part of a broader struggle for educational reform and wholesale social change. In the 1930s, the KKE, a Stalinist party, reformulated its overall political analysis and its approach to language matters: based on Marr's assumption that different social classes within a society had different languages, the language question became an

67 Moschonas, 'Ενας αιώνας δημοτικισμού', π΄, πβ΄.

68 Glinos, 'Το γλωσσικό ζήτημα', 186–7.

69 See P. Rousos, 'Η διδασκαλία του συντρόφου Στάλιν και η ελληνική γλώσσα', part 1, *Νέος Κόσμος* 3 (1951), no. 4, 43–50 [43–4].

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issue within the class struggle in its own right. This change of position tallied with the new functions of demotic and *katharevousa* in the 1920s and 1930s: it provided a clearer political orientation and thus, from the KKE's point of view, confirmed Marr's analysis of 'class language'.

By opting for an account of SEKE and the KKE's ideas on language and the language debates which emphasizes the effects of political landmarks in the history of the party and the communist movement, rather than solely cultural developments within Greece or shifts in the Demoticist movement and the language debates, this article has shown that there is a correlation between political changes within the KKE and transformations in its ideas on language. Thus it proposes a new methodological approach to the study of the party's stance on the language question that explains and contextualizes these changes in relation to broader international and local political struggles. It highlights the pivotal influence of Marxism on the cultural life of Greece and calls for a further study of the position(s) of the KKE and the Left in general vis-à-vis the language question. This indicates the need to acknowledge the importance, on the one hand, of political transformations within the Greek Left, and on the other, of developments in linguistic and cultural matters within the USSR.

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