

Kormakiti Arabic: A study of language decay and language death

Ozan Gulle

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

Kormakiti Arabic (also called Cypriot Maronite Arabic) is a language with approximately 150–200 speakers in Kormakitis, a village north-western Cyprus. Kormakiti Arabic is highly endangered, not only due to its low number of speakers but more importantly because younger Maronites with their roots in Kormakitis do not acquire Kormakiti Arabic naturally any more. Kormakitis itself is almost only inhabited by elderly Maronites who lived there before the separation of Cyprus in 1974. This paper is on language death and language decay of Kormakiti Arabic. Several historical sources are used in order to illustrate the historical and socio-linguistic environment this language survived until today. The linguistic evidence is then compared with the theory of Gaelic-Arvanitika-Model Sasse (1992a) in order to show parallels, as well as the differences between Arvanitika and Kormakiti Arabic.

1. INTRODUCTION. Kormakiti Arabic is a minority language spoken by Maronites in the villages Kormakitis, in north-western Cyprus. The language is tightly knitted with Cypriot Maronites (which is why it is sometimes called Cypriot Maronite Arabic, though I shall discuss why this term is not correct) and in order to understand Kormakiti Arabic and its current status as a highly endangered language, it is crucial to understand the socio-linguistic history of Cyprus.

The research this paper is based on is part of a Ph.D. project on structural convergence in Cyprus among Cypriot Greek, Cypriot Turkish and Kormakiti Arabic.¹ All of these three languages have their respective corpora. The corpus of Kormakiti Arabic consists of approximately 5000 tokens and includes texts from Borg (1985), as well as from own field research. Borg (1985) is the most detailed grammar on Kormakiti Arabic which has its own text collection (unfortunately without any audio support). It is, however, not the first or only work on this language. The first research on Kormakiti Arabic was Newton (1964) “An Arabic-Greek Dialect”, followed by Tsiapera (1969) “A Descriptive Analysis of Cypriot Maronite Arabic”. Apart from these descriptive works, there are also a few papers on Kormakiti Arabic such as Jastrow (1977) “Gedanken zum zypriotischen Arabisch”.

This paper illustrates how endangered Kormakiti Arabic is and how its endangered language status came to be, using historical as well as linguistic data. The historical and socio-linguistic data will be used to support these claims, as I assume that socio-linguistic

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parameters are the main decisive factors behind language contact. The main focus of this paper is on language death and language decay, which shall be elucidated in their respective chapters.

2. CYPRIOT MARONITES. Maronites are Eastern Syriac Christians belonging to the Eastern Catholic Church. They are named after Saint Maron who lived near Mount Taurus, thus the name “Maronite” actually refer to a religious community rather than to an ethnic/national one (Hourani 2007: 1). There is a Maronite community in Lebanon today of a considerable size and a Maronite diaspora in various countries. Throughout the history, many Maronites migrated to Cyprus in different waves due to different historical events.

According to Hourani (2007: 1–5), the first appearance of Cypriot Maronites on Cyprus begins around the 7th or 8th century, mainly due to Islamic conquest of Maronites homeland (which was mainly today’s Lebanon and Syria after their dispersion from Antioch) and the inter-Christian rivalries between the Jacobites and Byzantines. The destruction of Saint Maron’s monastery in Apamea around 938 caused another wave of immigration, followed by a third one upon the purchase of the island by Guy de Lusignan from the Knights Templar at the end of 12th century (Hourani 2007: 5, Kyrris 1985: 212). The last wave happened after the defeat of the Crusaders in Tripoli and the Holy Land. In 1121 and 1141, two Maronite monks were appointed by the Maronite Patriarchs to be abbots of the St. John Chrysostom monastery at Koutzoventi. Hill (1948: 3) mentions a lack of record of Maronites on the island between 1141 and the end of the 13th century. Reportedly, they chose not to settle in cities but in the mountains north of Nicosia. They must have had a “chief centre” called *Tala* or *Attala* in Karpas but Hill writes that this place was then “no longer traceable”. Hill also notes that under the last years of the Lusignan rule, the number of Maronites must have been around 7000 and 8000 (Hill 1948: 4). Tsoutsouki (2009: 209) notes that Maronites indeed came from different regions. Thus, inhabitants of Kormajit originate from Kur in north of Lebanon, the inhabitants of Asomatos from Shmat in Byblos, and the people of Ayia Marina from Qanoubine area. The ancestors of people from Karpasha are allegedly from a village close to Tripoli.

Kyrris (1985: 206) counts the villages Kormakitis (originally Krommyakites), Asomatos, Karpasia, and Kambyli among the Maronite villages of Cyprus. Apart from these, Ayia Marina (also called *Santa Marina* in Gemayel (2009: 139)) also used to be a Maronite village according to my Maronite informants.² It is not known, how many villages the Maronites had during the Lusignan and Venetian rule, but according to Gemayel (2009: 137), right after the Ottoman conquest, the Maronites did not have more than 33 villages.³ Tsoutsouki (2009: 203) reports that by 196, there were 19 Maronite villages.

2.1. SOCIAL STATUS OF CYPRIOT MARONITES. The beginning of the Lusignan and thus Catholic reign on Cyprus marks one of the most important turning points in history for Cypriot Maronites. During the Lusignan rule in Cyprus, the Maronite community in Cyprus saw an increase in its social status. Maronites were Catholic just like their Lusignan rulers on the island, and, following Hourani (2007: 8), they received extensive freedoms and exemptions, though she does not explicitly give examples. Consequently, the Cypriot Maronites began losing their social status after the Ottomans conquest of the island from the Venetians. According to Hourani (2009), “[w]hen the Orthodox Church regained its

² Tsoutsouki (2009: 204) writes that the villagers in Ayia Marina converted to Islam.

³ Gemayel (2009) does not say whether these villages were mixed or purely Maronite.

power, which it had lost during centuries of Catholic rule, its members remembered the oppression of the Catholics and since most of the Catholics who were in the island were the Maronites, they began their retaliation against them.” (117–118). Catholic churches were confiscated by the Orthodox Church and the members of the Catholic church were accused of working against the Ottoman rule. As a result, many members of the Maronite clergy were imprisoned or killed and the believers of the Catholic church were forced to convert to the Orthodox faith. As a result of being under the control of the Orthodox church, the Maronite churches were closed on major religious holidays in order to punish the believers of the Catholic faith for belonging to it (Gemayel 2009: 140). The reason for the Catholics being under the Orthodox church was the Ottoman ferman (royal decree) of October 1571 forbidding Catholics to live or own property in Cyprus, including the churches (Kyrris 1985: 254). The remaining Catholics were forced to belong either to the Orthodox church or the Muslim community. The Catholic church was re-established on the island after the peace treaty with Venice on 07.03.1573, but the survivors of the Ottoman conquest were already forced to leave their religion in this brief period and the property damage was done.

Today, Maronite Cypriots have more or less the same social status as Greek Cypriots. Although they would go to a Catholic church on Sunday and not to an Orthodox one, they exclusively speak Cypriot Greek in public and have Greek (or at least hellenized) names. Tsoutsouki (2009: 194) refers that the Maronites are “Greek in public and Maronites at home”. Since 1974, the hellenization of Maronite Cypriots accelerated as most of them were forced to leave their home villages, thus also their cultural centres. Tsoutsouki (2009: 205) mentions that the inhabitants of the four Maronite villages made up more than 97% of the Maronite population on the island. After 1974, they enjoyed a privilege granted to no other community in Cyprus, namely crossing the Green Line. After the opening of borders in 2003, this has even become easier, allowing Maronites to visit their villages more often.

3. KORMAKITIS AND KORMAKITI ARABIC. Although it is usually called Cypriot Maronite Arabic, the language is not spoken by Maronites outside of Kormakitis, except for the Kormakitis Maronites who migrated to cities after 1974. It is, thus, not the language of Cypriot Maronites but the language of Cypriot Maronites from Kormakitis. Obviously, the village Kormakitis is the centre of Kormakiti Arabic and of the culture. Inhabitants trace their roots back to Kur in today’s Syria where their ancestors migrated to Cyprus. Kormajit allegedly comes from the phrase *Kor ma-jit*, meaning “Kor did not come”. As to why Maronites from other villages do not speak the language, there are no written records. Some inhabitants from Kormakitis stated that the Maronites in other villages never spoke Arabic and speculate that they might have been hellenized linguistically before arriving in Cyprus. The inhabitants of Kormakitis often refer to their language as *luṣa tel-ḏeṣa* (“language of the village”) or simply as *aravika* (“Arabic” in Greek).

Today, every speaker of Kormakiti Arabic is bilingual in Greek. Most of its speakers are above 40–50 years old and there is little chance that the language will survive in a few generations, unless the language revitalization efforts prove to be successful. There is also no written standard for the language, except for the systems developed in the last decades by linguists who documented the language and its speakers when trying to teach the language to younger generations of Maronites who did not learn it from their parents. Although the Maronites of Kormakitis (and Cypriot Maronites in general) went through difficult times concerning their social and religious situation, these did not cause the speakers of Kormakiti Arabic to shift to Greek. According to the elderly informants, the shift to Greek started happening in the 1950s, possibly due to the increasing ethnic tensions in Cyprus, though the

informants did not mention it specifically. The ultimate completion of the shift process was 1974 when Cyprus was divided into two parts and many working Kormakitis Maronites left their village and moved to southern Cyprus, while the elderly stayed in Kormakitis which is now in the northern part of the island.

4. BETWEEN LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND LANGUAGE DEATH. Language contact scenarios are usually divided into two, namely “language maintenance” and “language shift” (Thomason 2001, Thomason & Kaufman 1988). Roughly, the speakers keep their native language in a language maintenance scenario, whereas they shift to another language in a language shift scenario. Language maintenance can range from casual contact to very strong cultural pressure (Thomason & Kaufman 1988: 74–6). The main idea behind the whole theory is that the stronger the social interaction between two speech community is, the more intense the language contact phenomena are going to be. Thus, causal language contact only leads to lexical borrowings, whereas stronger social interaction may lead to morphological and syntactic borrowings.

Language shift, on the other hand, has its own mechanics. Changes caused by language shift are usually found in the “target language”, i.e., the language to which the speakers shift. What is more relevant and interesting for this paper is the indirect effect language shift might have – “language death”. The term language death is generally used to describe the situation when a language does not have any speakers left. As Crystal (2002) puts it, a language is practically dead when the second last speaker dies, as there is no one else left for the last remaining speaker to speak the language to, except for maybe a few semi-speakers who understand it but cannot speak.

As to how language death occurs, Sasse emphasizes that it is first external factors that affect the whole situation, causing the speech behavior to change, which in turn then leads to changes in the linguistic structure (Sasse 1992b: 13). Language death is caused primarily by language shift (excluding a handful other completely non-linguistic factors which may also cause it, such as for instance genocide). Sasse defines language shift as an interruption in “language transmission”, i.e., the speakers stop passing on the language to the younger generations. In a process which he calls “primary language shift”, the speakers make another language “primary language” and their native tongue “secondary language”. This may be followed by speakers giving the abandoned language a negative value; or sometimes considering it to be positive, when it is seen as a feature of identification, and in other cases to be negative, e.g., as a tool for everyday communication (Sasse 1992b: 14). At this point, the linguistic changes in the abandoned language can be observed as it goes under a process called “language decay” (sometimes also called “language attrition”). This stage is named thus as certain features of the language begin to disappear and a new kind of speakers arise. These speakers, called “semi-speakers”, have an “imperfect knowledge” of the language, since they were never fully exposed to it. Sasse (1992a) categorizes the semi-speakers in two types. The first group of semi-speakers are the ones with good language proficiency but who never became full speakers due to lack of a regular use of the language. They are called “forgetters” or “rusty speakers” who have gaps in the lexical repository but otherwise know the language. These type of semi-speakers can be found in a situation where a rapid language shift took place or the language is dying, and many of the speakers ceased transmitting the language whereas some of them still do. Type 2 constitutes the group of semi-speakers who are also called “semi-speaker proper” who grew up in families with no language transmission to its children. The children can pick up some of the language by listening to the elderly speaking among themselves and maybe occasion-

ally speaking it themselves with the elderly (Sasse 1992a: 62). Thus, there is a continuum of semi-speakers with different proficiencies.

As long as a language does not suffer from a sudden death, i.e. all of its speakers dying out due to war, disease or another non-linguistic reasons, there is always a certain time period in which the dying language undergoes certain changes. Naturally, the mechanisms involved in language death are different than those in language maintenance. Although it is difficult to define “the” mechanisms of language death, as it is with language contact in general since “anything goes” (Thomason 2001), we are able to observe similar changes in dying languages. Sasse (1992a) exemplifies certain changes in *Arvanitika*, the Albanian dialect in Greece (its very name stands for “Albanian” in Greek), which died out due to its speakers’ shift to Greek – a situation very similar to that of Kormakiti Arabic. By observing the changes in *Arvanitika*, it is maybe possible to draw some similarities to the changes in Kormakiti Arabic. The model presented by Sasse (1992a) is called Gaelic-Arvanitika-Model (GAM) and it is a model of gradual death.

1. The first change was the loss of subordinative mechanisms. As Sasse explains it: “Arvanitika semi-speakers do not use gerund forms of the verb in spite of the fact that there is an exact parallel form in Greek. The most frequent type of subordinate clause is the short relative clause. Adverbial clauses are avoided except for those introduced by ‘when’ or ‘if’. At the phrase level, modifiers are rare; genitives and adjectives are not frequently used.” (Sasse 1992a: 70).
2. The second change was the loss of systematic integration, i.e., the Greek lexical items were not integrated into *Arvanitika* phonetical and phonological system and were used in the exact same form as in Greek. For example, *tileoras* is the Greek borrowing for “television” in *Arvanitika*, but the semi-speakers were using the original Greek form *tileorasi*.
3. The third change was the breakdown of grammatical categories, as the whole TAM system was coming apart and the semi-speakers did not differentiate between forms like the future particle *do* and the subjunctive particle *tə*, even inventing mixed forms such as *de* or *də* (Sasse 1992a: 70).
4. The final change was “agrammatism”, as Sasse calls it. He defines it as “the total disintegration of the morphological system” with effects such as the loss of suppletive forms in paradigms, the mixing-up of personal markers in verbs, the regularization of plural noun forms, and the syntax getting mixed up. Sasse also notes that although semi-speakers were making these mistakes in their language, there were utterances which they were perfectly producing. This is due to the fact the speakers know certain utterances by heart and can repeat them. The mistakes listed usually happen when these semi-speakers were asked to be creative and form spontaneous utterances (Sasse 1992a: 72).
5. Semi-speakers also had problems finding lexical items.
6. Extreme phonological variation and distortion can be observed in the speech of semi-speakers.
7. Lastly, semi-speakers use phonological hypercorrections. In the case of *Arvanitika*, a lexical item like *herə* became *çerə* under the influence of Greek phonology, where

the same phoneme is /x/ before back vowels and /ç/ before front vowels. Then, in an “attempt to imitate the ‘something different’”, the semi-speakers pronounced it as *xerə* (Sasse, 1992a: 72).

Although these may not be the exact changes in Kormakiti Arabic, the Arvanitika examples show a general tendency towards both generalization/standardization, confusion and loss in language usage. These examples and tendencies are going to be the basis for a comparison between language death in Kormakiti Arabic and Arvanitika. In general, the aspects of language decay are easy to observe and I follow Sasse in his notion that “the bulk of typical decay phenomena, especially agrammatism, syntactic reduction, and extreme variability, is so different from what happens in normal contact-induced change, that it can be clearly set off from the latter.” (Sasse, 1992a, 75).

This list of features of language decay by Sasse is very similar to what other scholars discussed on this topic. Dressler (1988) lists several structural and functional changes during language decay, namely: 1) Borrowing of several lexical items without necessary phonological and phonetic integration. Dressler calls these lexical items “Gastwörter” (lit. “guest words”) (Dressler 1988: 1552); 2) Loss or change in the phonology and intonation of the language by semi-speakers; 3) The native “productive processes” of the language are lost and replicated with those of the contact language; 4) Too much phonological/lexical variation; 5) Loss of stylistic registers, which leads to a monostylistic language.

4.1. STRUCTURAL BORROWINGS IN KORMAKITI ARABIC. This paper focuses more on language death and language decay regarding Kormakiti Arabic, and not so much on the borrowings. The reason for including structural borrowings is to prove two important points: 1) Language maintenance and language shift need not be mutually exclusive (Thomason & Kaufman 1988: 45), and language contact is a dynamic process. Two languages can be in a stable contact situation where both speech communities maintain their languages during a certain period, while the whole situation tips over in another period, where changes in socio-linguistic situation cause the speakers of one speech community to shift to the other language. 2) Following the first point, not every language contact phenomenon in Kormakiti Arabic can be attributed to language decay. There are certain cases which most probably have happened while the speakers of Kormakiti Arabic were still maintaining their language. Due to space restrictions, I will only mention two such examples.

4.1.1. DIRECTIVE AND LOCATIVE MARKING. Kormakiti Arabic seems to lack any marking for directive and locative, very similar to spoken Greek. In written Greek, locative or directive is usually marked with an inflected form of *stos* (which is probably a grammaticalization of the locative/directive preposition *se* as a proclitic on the article) followed by a noun in the accusative. In spoken Greek (in Cyprus and on the mainland), this preposition is usually missing and the directive or locative is only marked with the accusative case. Since Kormakiti Arabic lacks any case, these constructions are not marked in the language. This separates Kormakiti Arabic from other varieties of Levantine Arabic which do not only mark directive and locative, but also differentiate between these two.

- (1) a. Directive (Borg (1985): “Our experiences in war”)

ana smaʕ-at oti eprepen ta-rux stratyoti
 PRN.1SG hear-PST.1SG COMP NEC SUBJ-go.1SG army
 “I heard that I was supposed to go to the army.”

- b. Locative (Borg (1985): “Stories about my youth.”)

koʕot-na exte saʕat-ayn k-kafene
 sit.PST-1PL one hour-DUAL ART-coffee.house
 “We sat inside the cafe for about a couple of hours.”

However, I heard and noted speakers of Maronite Arabic using *fi* to mark locative (as in other Arabic varieties) on various occasions. As I discussed my notes with the speakers, however, they insisted that *fi* is sometimes used due to the influence of Levantine Arabic, but in “true” Maronite Arabic locative is not marked. There are few cases of evidence, though, which speak for a different or “Greek” usage of *fi*, i.e., for directive and locative purposes. Example (2) shows the locative use of *fi* in Kormakiti Arabic.

- (2) Usage of *fi* in Kormakiti Arabic

pšan ta-llaki xadap prepi ta-rrux barra fi-l-lixkali
 for SUBJ-find wood NEC SUBJ-go.1PL outside in-ART-field
 “In order to find wood we go out to the field(s).”

Thus, it is possible to conclude that this category of Kormakiti Arabic has been influenced by both Standard Greek and colloquial Greek. The fact that all Maronites are bilingual in Greek and their education is in Greek, enabling them to master the colloquial variety as well as the standard language, makes this conclusion even more plausible. It can also be observed that this usage of *fi* is a newer development, as it was only found in the speech of one younger speaker. There is a third possibility that the usage of *fi* is related to influence of Standard Arabic or Lebanese Arabic. Some of the active members of the Maronite community (especially the ones from Kormakitis) learn some Lebanese Arabic due to their contacts with other Maronites in Lebanon. According to the metadata collected during fieldwork, the speaker in example (2) knows some Lebanese Arabic and when I inquired him about the usage of *fi*, he admitted that it is actually a Lebanese Arabic “word” and not a Kormakiti Arabic one, thus admitting that he formed this clause under the influence of Lebanese Arabic. This fact serves as an evidence that Kormakiti Arabic is not entirely isolated from the Levantine varieties, especially from Lebanese Arabic.

Furthermore, the influence of the Greek locative/directive marker *se* (usually has the clitic form [*st* + case/person/number inflection] and the whole construction is basically [*se* + article]) seems to have also influenced Kormakiti Arabic with its locative usage. Example (3) shows the directive usage of *fi*. It is an example from Borg (1985) produced (probably) by a native speaker of Kormakiti Arabic, i.e., not a semi-speaker.

- (3) Borg (1985): “A story”

istera vakʕa fi žre-y ađak l-itšauš
 then fall.PST.3SG in feet-1SG that ART-sergeant
 “Then the sergeant fell at my feet.”

Since the Levantine Arabic varieties do not use *fi* for directive purposes, the usage of this morpheme for locative and directive marking can also be attributed to Greek. This phenomenon is interesting as both the informal and formal structures of Greek have affected Kormakiti Arabic, which can be explained due to long time bilingualism. One could also argue that these are effects of language death, i.e., the whole locative/directive system has collapsed and the speakers are using the Greek structures depending on whether they feel that they are speaking more formally or completely informally.

4.1.2. IMPERATIVE INFLECTION OF “TO COME”. A very interesting case of borrowing are the imperative forms of the verb “to come” as described in Borg (1985: 91). The verb “to come” in Kormakiti Arabic can be expressed through the radicals *žyy*. Thus, for example, third person masculine past tense is inflected as *ža* (“he came”). The imperative forms of this verb are, however, borrowed from Greek, whilst incorporating them in the Arabic system. The imperative forms of “to come” in Greek are *ela* in singular and *elate* in plural. *Ela* is also the imperative of “to come” in Kormakiti Arabic, while its feminine singular form is *eli*, and its plural form is *elu* (without gender specification).

4.2. LANGUAGE DECAY. Kormakiti Arabic is not only a moribund language; every piece of knowledge we have on this language originates from last three-four decades, when the language has already started dying out. Here, I shall illustrate those features of the language which show parallels with language decay of Arvanitika and discuss how these features are in fact related to language decay.

4.2.1. LOSS OF SYSTEMATIC INTEGRATION. This is one of the most visible signs of language decay in Kormakiti Arabic. There are still lexical items which stand as a testament of a previous stage of language contact when the lexical borrowings were integrated into the Arabic system, e.g. the plural forms of nouns. Thus, the speakers borrowed the lexeme *ksinari* (“axe”) from Greek as *kšinar* by integrating it in an Arabic singular pattern and then derived its plural form using the same Arabic pattern, *kšenir*⁴ (Borg 1985: 69). Another example for this kind of lexical integration of nouns is the Greek lexeme *kammīni* which became *kammin* in Kormakiti Arabic and the plural form is *knemin*. This kind of integration is apparently not the case anymore, as can be seen in example (4).

(4) Borg (1985): “A story”

<i>allik</i>	<i>p-petrokopi,</i>	<i>n-tammet</i>	<i>l-ispīrīdkya</i>	<i>ta</i>
those	ART-stonecutters	PASS/MED-end.PST.3SG.F	ART-matches	REL
<i>kan-yišēlu</i>	<i>fayyes</i>			
PROG.PST-set.fire.3PL	dynamite.holes			

“While those stonecutters were igniting sticks of dynamite, the matches got used up.”

The lexemes *petrokopi*, *ispīrīdkya* and *fayyes* are all Greek and are embedded in the Kormakiti Arabic clause much like code-switching. All three lexemes are inflected in Greek with the appropriate plural morphemes. This clause is not from a recent field work but from Borg (1985), it means that it must have been recorded before 1985. If such examples should be considered a feature of language decay, then we must assume that language

⁴ Although Borg provides the Greek origin of the lexeme as *ksinari*, in Cypriot Greek it is in fact *kšinari* which explains the /ʃ/ phoneme in Kormakiti Arabic.

decay in Kormakiti Arabic began well before 1980s. This should not come as a surprise as the speakers whom I conducted interviews with stated that the language shift began in the 1950s. We do not know how proficient this speaker was, whether he/she was fully proficient or a rusty speaker in Sasse's terms.

A weak point of this feature as an argument for language decay is the difficulty to distinguish between loss of systematic integration due to language decay and casual (or even systematic) code-switching. One can see various other signs of language decay in Kormakiti Arabic which would speak for accepting these examples as loss of integration, but this kind of argumentation is somehow circular. It is certainly important to consider whether these lexemes never had any counterparts in Kormakiti Arabic or whether their counterparts are lost. Another feature of language decay mentioned by Sasse could be referred at this point in order to explain the situation mentioned above, namely the fact that semi-speakers have difficulties in finding lexical items in their language.

The remaining speakers of Kormakiti Arabic often complain that many modern words such as *car* and *computer* do not exist in their language, which they see as a problem for the revitalization of the language. Should we also assume that the language never had the words for "stonecutter", "matches" and "fire"? Even if we do, example (5) should make it rather clear that we can assume a systematic loss of lexical material in the language as well as loss of systematic integration.

(5) Borg (1985): "A story"

kun-na-ll-u ḏ-ḏikasti l-istoria šait-na u
 say-PST-1PL-IO-3SG ART-judge ART-story POSS.F-1PL and
kanyitxak u-v uo
 PROG.PST-laugh.3SG.M too PRN.3SG.M
 "We told the judge our story and he too had a good laugh."

It is quite understandable for the speakers of Kormakiti Arabic to have borrowed the lexeme *ḏikasti* since it is part of the administrative register that in the history of Cyprus never existed in Kormakiti Arabic. It is difficult to judge whether there is a phonological integration. The original Greek form in nominative singular would be *ḏikastis*, so we can observe a slight change in the lexeme, which is not always the case, since many examples from my own recordings do show other lexemes with the final /s/ intact. Concerning the lexeme *istoria*, one can state without doubt that it provides evidence for loss of lexical material, since it is difficult to imagine that Kormakiti Arabic lacked the word for *story*.

4.2.2. LOSS OF SUBORDINATIVE MECHANISMS. There are evidences of several unusual features in the subordinative system of Kormakiti Arabic and language contact must have had an influence on this aspect of the language. Whether one could speak of a loss in this case, requires further investigation of the language. For this reason, I will only present a short overview of clause subordination in Kormakiti Arabic.

Sasse mentions that the subordinated clauses in Arvanitika are usually short relative clauses, and the only adverbial clauses are the conditional and temporal ones. Relative clauses in Kormakiti Arabic are introduced by the relativizer *ta* and are quite productive. A quick search for the relativizer shows that relative clauses were used 63 times in my corpus of Kormakiti Arabic. I am not aware of any universal ratio of relative clauses per main clause and therefore it is difficult to measure whether this number is high, normal or low. In any case, relative clauses are being used in Kormakiti Arabic. The adverbial clauses are a

different case due to their formal nature. Though these clauses are often used in Kormakiti Arabic, they are often introduced by Greek adverbials, as can be seen in example (6), where the adverbial clause marker *molis* is used.

(6) Borg (1985): “A story”

molis *rkaʕa-t* *iʒri* *u* *rux-t* *ta-tlaʕa* *parra*
 as.soon.as hit-PST.1SG feet-1SG and go-PST.1SG SUBJ-get.out out
 “Just as I stamped my foot and was about to go out.”

This is not an individual case or spontaneous code-switching as *molis* is used systematically in Kormakiti Arabic. There are in fact various Greek adverbials being used systematically in Kormakiti Arabic such as *istera* (“afterwards”) and *amma* (“when”), alongside with native adverbials. Even though many of the native adverbials were replaced by Greek ones, I argue that this is a case of massive borrowing and not of language decay, as subordination is still being used widely in Kormakiti Arabic speech. Even the complement clauses are widely used, although they are introduced by the Greek complementizer *oti*. As for the loss of subordinative mechanisms on the phrasal level, i.e., loss of modification and possessive constructions, this is simply not true for Kormakiti Arabic.

4.2.3. BREAKDOWN OF GRAMMATICAL CATEGORIES. Contrary to Arvanitika, the breakdown of grammatical categories is not the case in Kormakiti Arabic, since the TAM system is surprisingly almost completely intact. The tense and aspect consist entirely of native Arabic morphemes, whereas there are a few cases of loss in the modal system. One example is the necessitative modal verb *prepi* which is Greek and is inflected as in Greek when used for the third person. According to my research, it seems that the necessitative is only expressed this way.

The same can be said for agrammatism, since we could not observe the radical lack of proficiency and “the total disintegration of the morphological system” in the case Kormakiti Arabic.

4.2.4. PHONOLOGICAL VARIATION, DISTORTION, AND HYPERCORRECTIONS. This feature of Arvanitika cannot be observed directly in Kormakiti Arabic, as I could not observe any variation or distortion of any kind in my corpus. What could be considered a similar change is the complete adoption of Greek phonology, except for the retention of the Arabic ayin phoneme /ʕ/. The loss of its own phonetics and phonology can be interpreted as a kind of distortion, but it is a much more radical one.

4.2.5. SUMMARY. The comparison above shows that language death in Arvanitika and in Kormakiti Arabic constitutes itself in different ways, although the context of language contact shows certain parallels. This summary illustrates that language shift and language decay in Kormakiti Arabic must be new phenomena; or at least we must assume that there was a period of language maintenance before the language shift set on. The main reason why these two dying languages are behaving differently from each other during language death and decay could be the semi-speakers. Sasse places the semi-speaker in the middle of his language decay theory. The semi-speaker is the reason why the language decay occurs in the first place and without the semi-speaker we would have language death without decay. The lack of semi-speakers could be the reason why we do not observe much

more language decay in Kormakiti Arabic. There are certainly speakers who can be categorized as rusty speakers, i.e., speakers with full proficiency who did not or do not speak Kormakiti Arabic for long periods of time due to several reasons, such as moving away from Kormakitis due to work or family. We would indeed expect from these rusty speakers to have problems retrieving the lexical items from their Kormakiti Arabic repository and using more and more Greek borrowings in their speech. There are, however, almost no type 2 semi-speakers of Kormakiti Arabic. The language shift happened very sudden and changed the balance of power for the languages in Kormakitis. The following quote is from an informant who went to school before the language shift has started. He explains his school years⁵:

When we first went to school, we could not speak Greek. We did not know anything and we used to speak only Arabic. We could not speak Greek and our teacher was getting tired of us. He was strenuous with us until we learnt to speak Greek. So at home, with my family, we used to speak only Arabic. So it was very hard and every morning when we went there [to school], the teacher asked us – to teach us Greek – he asked us “what did you eat today?” And we had to answer in Greek. But we could not speak Greek and answered in Arabic.

The speakers of Kormakiti Arabic were becoming bilinguals after the school age, as they were going to the Greek schools. The language was being transmitted to the young speakers who were speaking it in the village. When language shift came and the language was not transmitted at home, the children did not have any other possibility of learning the language. This shift somehow hindered the emergence of semi-speakers. There are few passive speakers I met, who claim that they can understand a few Kormakiti Arabic but they cannot speak it. These passive speakers (and also other full speakers) usually perceive Kormakiti Arabic proficiency in a binary style. One is either fluent in it or one cannot speak it at all.

5. LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION EFFORTS AND DIFFICULTIES. After mentioning language death in the case of Kormakiti Arabic, I would like to briefly describe the efforts to revitalize the language. Since both government authorities in Cyprus are quite indifferent to the vitality of Kormakiti Arabic, Maronites from Kormakitis are organizing revitalization activities themselves. Their status under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages help them in getting financial support from the European Union for projects and for networking with other linguistic minorities in Europe, such as the Sámi people in Norway.

Today, Kormakiti Arabic is only taught in one private school – St. Maron’s school in Nicosia – in the form of afternoon classes. Last year, around 80 children were learning the language at this school. Although Kormakiti Arabic is recognized by the Republic of Cyprus under European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages, the classes cannot be included in the normal school curriculum, because the government requires the school to present learning materials for every subject.

There is a project called *xki fi sanna* (“speak in our language”) which is organizing language summer camps every year in Kormakitis. Children visiting this summer camp are divided in different age groups in which they learn and practice the language, and then do

⁵ Original in Kormakiti Arabic, translation by author

some performances to the village, which include for instance singing songs in Kormakiti Arabic or playing theatrical pieces which do not only portray the language but also the culture of the village.

These language revitalization efforts face numerous challenges. The largest obstacle is the fact that the young people with their origins in Kormakitis are not exposed to the language any more. They live in large cities in the southern Cyprus, which are predominantly monolingual in Greek, and they are raised in this environment. Sometimes even their parents cannot speak Kormakiti Arabic. Moreover, there are almost no economic or social advantages in speaking Kormakiti Arabic. Thus, many young people are not motivated to learn the language. It is also crucial to note that the language is not important for the speakers' identity either. Maronites define themselves through their religion, Eastern Catholicism. This feature is enough to separate themselves from every other linguistic or religious group in Cyprus, and it is enough to mark their identity. Finally, the lack of institutional support for Kormakiti Arabic proves it even more difficult to revitalize the language.

6. RECAPITULATION AND FURTHER RESEARCH. Linguistic evidence and historical data on Kormakiti Arabic point out to a rather quick language death scenario for the language. The attitudes of the authorities and the speakers of the language pose many difficulties for language revitalization efforts. As this minority language is most probably not going to survive for much longer, it is necessary to act rapidly in order to fully document it. Although there are several books and papers on Kormakiti Arabic, audio recordings are rare and there is no linguistic documentation based on a multimedia (audio and video) collection of primary data. The researches done until today have not yet exhausted the interests of linguistics. There is, for example, very little research on language acquisition and speaker behaviors in Kormakiti Arabic. As stated on the website of the NGO xki fi sanna, Kormakiti Arabic is still a “goldmine” for ethnographic and linguistic research.⁶

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⁶ <http://sana.squarespace.com/> (15 January, 2014).

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Ozan Gulle
Ozan.Guelle@lipp.lmu.de