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LANGUAGE ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE DIALECT OF CRETE: THE EFFECT OF THE DIALECT ON SALES MANAGEMENT

Various research studies have shown that speakers' language attitudes affect the employability of dialectal speakers. According to Adler (1987), speakers with non-standard accents or speakers of dialects may not be selected when applying for jobs that require high communication skills. Regarding dialects, findings are controversial. Data from Rakic, Steffens and Mummendey's (2011) research support Adler's view on job interviews. However, Mai and Hoffmann's (2011) work opposes the view that dialect constrains sales effectiveness. The present study investigates the language attitudes of speakers of standard Greek towards the dialect of Crete in the sales professional area. The data indicate that although the participants' attitudes towards the use of dialects at work seem to be influenced by the metapragmatic stereotypes regarding dialects, we conclude that the sample in this research shows positive attitudes towards the Cretan dialect. Hence, the Cretan dialect is not an obstacle for someone who wishes to work in sales.

Keywords: Cretan dialect, language attitudes, sales, recruitment

1. INTRODUCTION

Dialects did not provide guarantees of social prestige of the creation a national common language; this resulted in the language varieties being sidelined within the framework of unification sought by national mechanisms (Tsitsipis 2001). The developments regarding establishment of a common/standard variety followed a similar path in Greece by setting the vernacular [Demotic Greek] as the nation's official language. Nevertheless, the emergence of Demotic Greek as the Greek nation's official language resulted in negative attitudes towards other dialects. The Demotic was considered as the appropriate language form for education, while different dialects were believed to have limited expressive

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potential even for everyday communication (Baslis 2017: 128). Thus, like for other nations, the theory of linguistic homogeneity was promoted in Greece, resulting in the marginalization of language diversity. The Mass Media and education played a decisive role in the transmission of this position.

Many sociolinguistic studies have focused on speakers' language attitudes² towards their dialect or other groups' language varieties in the past few decades. All these studies have shown that dialects are considered inferior linguistic systems used in oral communication in restricted social contexts. As already mentioned, speakers associate dialects with informal communication situations and the province's environment. In contrast, speakers consider only the standard variety appropriate for formal communication circumstances as a superior way of communication, so the only means of social, educational, and professional development (Kourdis 2007; Papanastasiou 2015; Papazachariou 2015; Tzakosta 2020). In particular, the use of dialects in formal communication circumstances is considered as a 'wrong' way of speaking (Papazachariou 2015). Therefore, the standard is regarded as the appropriate way of speaking and is associated with the language of education and, in general, with high-prestige professions (Kourdis 2007; Tzakosta 2020).

Speakers' language attitudes have a strong negative impact on dialectal speakers' life. As students are often discouraged from using their dialect, which is thought to cause learning problems. As a result, they experience lack self-confidence and they feel that their dialect is a wrong speech and inferior to the standard (Kakridi-Ferrari 2007). Then as adults, in many cases, they feel disadvantaged in their speech, so they hesitate to use their dialect. They try to adapt the standard to match their speech to the social expectations of a particular setting (Carlson & McHenry 2006). Regarding Greek dialects, several researchers as Pladi (2001) about the dialect of Litothoro, and Ploumidi (2016) who studied the Cretan dialect, align with this view. It is worth emphasizing, however, that the use of dialects in informal communication contexts often has positive evaluations, since it is an indicator of closeness and solidarity between the speakers (Pladi 2001; Kourdis 2007).

2. DIALECTS AND REGIONAL ACCENT IN THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Research on language attitudes has demonstrated that language sets a powerful influence within social structures. Listeners tend to respond differently to a person's speech, expressing their personal and social characteristics (Stewart, Ryan & Giles 1985). Today's globalized business environment is characterized by encounters with people with different linguistic backgrounds, and when communicating in any language, different language varieties inevitably overlap

² About language attitudes see Baker (1992); Kakridi-Ferrari (2007).

the interaction with each other. It is emphasized that different speech accents also appear in business interactions between members of the same country (Mai & Hoffmann 2013). However, it is pointed out that a person who speaks a non-standard variety is disadvantaged when applying for a job that requires high communication skills (Adler 1987: 43). Adler's position is confirmed by several studies, such as Hopper and Williams (1973), who investigated the influence of accent during job interviews, and Atkins (1993), which studied the influence that non-standard varieties have on hiring managers' decisions during a job interview.

However, the findings regarding the regional accent are controversial. Rakic, Steffens and Mummendey (2011) investigate whether job candidates are negatively evaluated not because of their lack of qualifications but because of their regional accent. In their research, regional accents of the German language are compared with the accent of standard German. The data showed that the speakers of standard German scored higher than the speakers of regional varieties on the socio-intellectual status scale and in terms of their competence. In the context of an interview, the regional accent triggers negative impressions of its speakers; thus, speakers with a regional accent were less likely to be hired (Rakic, Steffens & Mummendey 2011). Therefore, it is observed that many companies aim to reduce the number of dialect-speaking employees as they consider that employees who use the standard language are more effective at convincing buyers. On the contrary, the use of dialect is perceived to minimize the effectiveness (Carlson & McHenry 2006; Derwing & Munro 2009; Fuertes, Potere & Ramirez 2002).

Mai and Hoffmann's work (2011) is in line with previous studies (Cheng 1999; Floccia et al. 2006), which oppose the view that the use of dialect can reduce sales effectiveness, proving that a regional dialect can have a positive effect on social interactions. More data indicate that the use of dialects does not significantly affect customer satisfaction. At the same time, it can have positive results for companies, as it turned out that respondents did not downgrade dialects but characterized the speech they heard as an acceptable language variant, even though they recognized that it was a dialectal variety.

Although interpersonal communication is a fundamental salesperson activity during the selling process, only some studies have examined the interaction between the salesperson and the customer from a communication perspective. The salesperson is often the main or even the only link between the consumer and the company and their position is believed to influence how consumers evaluate the company. Finally, it is pointed out that the issue of dialectal-speaking salespeople has yet to be studied, and whether or not the salesperson's regional dialect ultimately affects sales success or not (Mai & Hoffmann 2011).

3. LANGUAGE ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE DIALECT OF CRETE ON SALES MANAGEMENT

The present study investigates the language attitudes of speakers of standard Greek towards the dialect of Crete in the sales professional area. The Cretan dialect is, to this day, alive, widely spoken and differentiated from common modern Greek (Kontosopoulos 2008: 28). It is reportedly the dialect with the most significant number of speakers in the Greek territory and one of the best-preserved dialects of modern Greek language (Tzakosta 2020). Apart from the island of Crete, there are speakers of Cretan dialect in other areas of Greece and outside its borders.

3.1. The aim of the study

This study arises from the language attitudes towards the modern Greek dialects, and the treatment of dialectal speakers in the working environment, and it aims to investigate how a dialectal speaker of the Cretan dialect is treated in a professional area in the urban setting. More specifically, this study explores speakers' attitudes towards speakers of the dialect of Crete who work as sellers in Athens. Furthermore, it examines if the sample would hire a Cretan dialectal speaker for a position in this working area. We chose to focus on this particular professional field because, in sales, the social interactions between salespeople and customers are characterized by direct communication. As a result, recruiters require that a salesperson have high communication skills. The purpose of the research was to investigate language attitudes towards the dialect of Crete in a working environment, as it is a social context that the dialectal varieties are considered inferior aspects of the Greek language. Many times, not only do people stigmatize their use, but also employees are stigmatized by their use. Furthermore, employability undoubtedly has a considerable influence on people's life.

3.2. Methodology

In order to investigate language attitudes in the workplace, we conducted a quantitative research (Mohajan 2020). We used a self-administered questionnaire consisting of 20 open-ended and closed-ended questions which were evaluated on the basis of a Likert type. Emphasis was placed on the anonymity of the participant's data.

3.3. The sample of the study

The research sample consists of forty people working in various companies in the prefecture of Attica in sales. It is highlighted that research to have generalizable and comparable results must have a sample of at least 30 people

(Panagiotakopoulos, Pierrakeas & Pindelas 2003). As regards the job position of the respondents, we could divide it into two categories. The first includes people who stated they are recruiters. In particular, they declared that they are store manager or store owner. The second category contains employees. Most of them said they were salespeople/sales consultants for the companies. Also, the sample is distinguished in different areas of sales. Nine people belonged to the workforce of an insurance company, so they dealt with insurance products. The rest of the participants work in retail stores selling products, mainly clothes, shoes, sports goods, home goods, and accessories.

Table 1 provides details on the demographic information of the participants.

Gender	80% women, 20% men
Age	30% 30 or less, 32,5% 31-40, 30% 41-50, 7,5% 51-60
Education	45% middle school/high school, 50% undergraduate & 5% postgraduate
Residence	Attica
Origin	57,5% Attica, 40% other areas
Position in the company	65% sellers, 35% recruiters (store owners & managers)

Table 1. Demographic information of the sample

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Findings (Language attitudes towards the Modern Greek Dialects)

The data reveal that the sample has a positive attitude towards the modern Greek dialects.

- i. The value of the dialects is equal to the standard (agreement 84%).
- ii. The dialects preserve cultural heritage (agreement 95%).
- iii. They disagree that the dialectal speakers are uneducated (disagreement 72.5%).
- iv. The use of dialects stigmatizes the speakers (disagreement 55%).
- v. The dialects are associated with the province (agreement 67,5 %).

The latter association (v) reflects a dominant stereotype of modern Greek dialects and places them in restricted communications contexts. However, most participants of this sample considers the value of modern Greek dialects equal to the standard (i) and disconnects them from some strong metapragmatic stereotypes³ about modern Greek dialects (iii, iv). With reference to the Cretan

³ According to Agha (2007: 148) metapragmatic stereotypes constitute speakers’ internalized language use models, enabling them to make evaluative judgments about their language behavior or that of others (See also Agha 2004).

Dialect, the sample reported that it is familiar with it (97,5%), and they affiliate it with Crete and its culture (95%). Finally, most have a positive attitude towards the Cretan dialect (82.5%). About the use of the Cretan dialect, they believe that it can be used:

- In everyday life (family and friends) (82,5%).
- In particular professions (10%).
- In any profession (40%).

4.2. Findings (Language attitudes towards the Cretan dialect on sales)

Regarding whether a salesperson's speech influences the consumers' opinion of the company (Chart 1), 52.5% (21 people) answered that they *strongly agree*, 15% (6 people) that they *somewhat agree*, and 20% (8 people) that they *neither agree or disagree*. The participants who disagreed with this proposal was fewer. More specifically, no person answered that they *somewhat disagreed*, and 12.5% (5 people) responded *strongly disagree*. This particular question examines the importance placed on a salesperson's speech. We conclude that most of the participants attach much importance to the sellers' speech, as direct communication with the consumer is required.

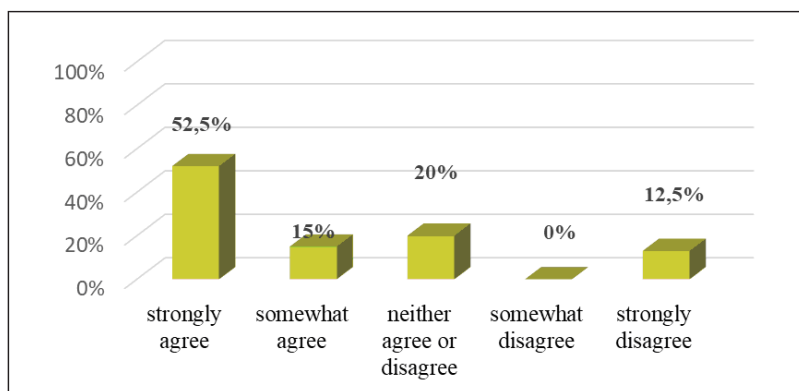


Chart 1. A salesperson's speech influences the consumers' opinion of the company

When asked how they believe the customers react to the use of the Cretan dialect by a salesperson (Chart 2), only 2.5% (1 person) answered *negatively*. The most significant percentage, 55% (22 people), answered *indifferently* and 42.5% (17 people) answered *positively*. Nevertheless, we consider the answer *indifferently* about this question as a positive result since the customers' indifference to hearing the Cretan dialect would not result in a negative attitude towards the seller, at least not because of their dialect.

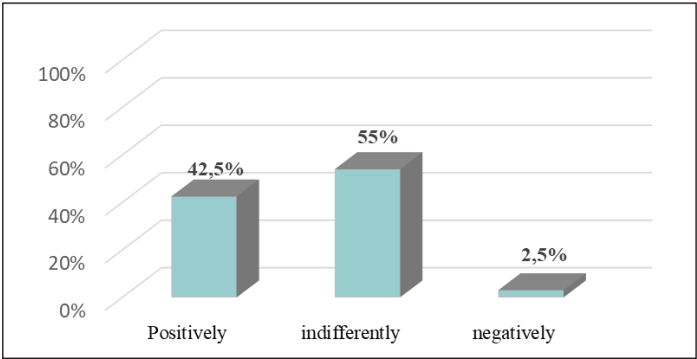


Chart 2. Customers’ reactions to the use of the Cretan dialect by a salesperson

Regarding whether they think that the use of the Cretan dialect could result in ineffective sales process (Chart 3), only 2.5% (1 person) answered *yes*, 52.5% (21 people) answered *no* and 45% (18 people) responded *maybe*. Data show that a high percentage of the sample consider that the sales process could be achieved efficiently.

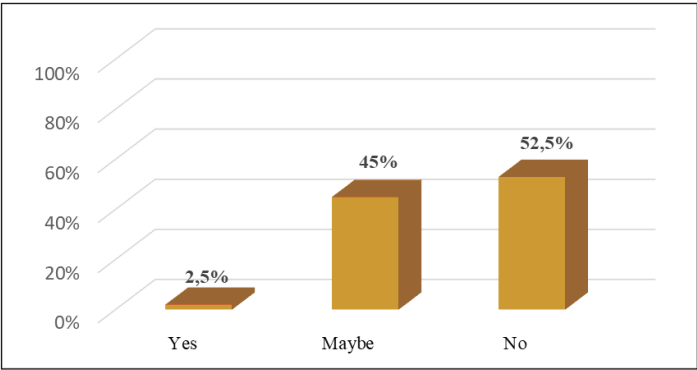


Chart 3. The use of the Cretan dialect could result in ineffective sales process.

Regarding whether the use of the Cretan dialect can negatively impact the success rate of sales (Chart 4), none of the participants answered that they *strongly agree* and 7.5% (3 people) answered *somewhat agree*, expressing some hesitation as regards the use of the Cretan dialect. 15% (6 people) answered that they *somewhat disagree* and 32.5% (13 people) display a positive attitude towards the dialect of Crete and responded *strongly disagree*. 45% (18 people) gave a neutral answer to this question, as they chose the answer *neither agree or disagree*, but we observe that a high percentage believe that using the Cretan dialect does not reduce sales effectiveness.

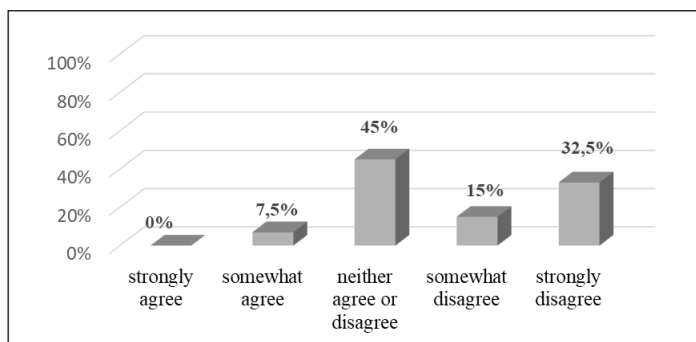


Chart 4. The use of the Cretan dialect can negatively impact the success rate of sales.

Regarding whether a salesperson speaking the standard language could showcase the products better to the consumer-than a dialectal one- (Chart 5), no person answered *strongly agree*, and 20% (8 people) seems to have reservations about salespeople speaking the Cretan dialect, as they responded *somewhat agree*. Meanwhile 42.5% (17 people) chose the answer *neither agree or disagree*, 2.5% (1 person) answered that they *somewhat disagree* and 35% (14 people) responded that they *strongly disagree*. Several participants selected the neutral response option, so they probably are skeptical of this comparison.

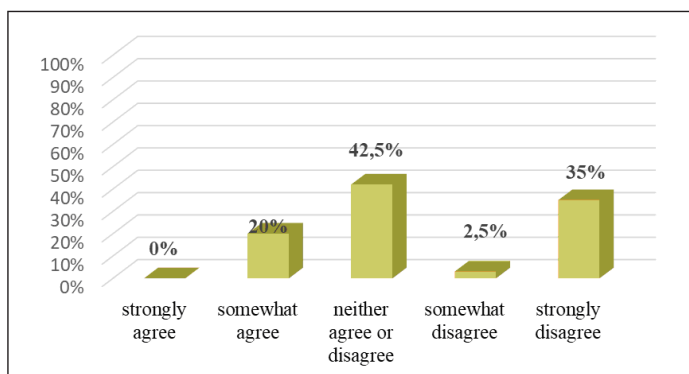


Chart 5. A salesperson speaking the standard language could showcase the products better to the consumer.

Regarding whether they would hire a Cretan dialectal speaker as a salesperson, regardless of whether they are recruiters (Chart 6), 65% (26 people) answered *yes*. Only 5% (2 people) chose the answer *no* and 30% (12 people) responded *might*. Data show that most of the participants would hire a Cretan dialectal speaker as a seller.

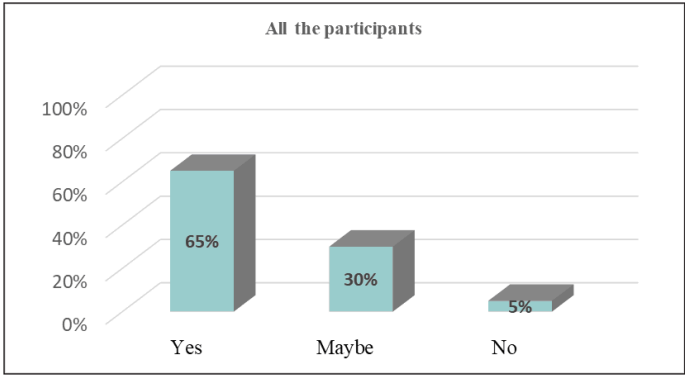


Chart 6. Hireability of a Cretan dialectal speaker as a salesperson

The recruiters’ responses about the hireability of dialectal speakers are presented in Chart 7. In more detail, 50% (7 people) answered *yes*, only 7,15% (1 person) answered *no* and 42,85% (6 people) answered *maybe*. We conclude that the results show positive attitudes towards the Cretan dialect, as half of them would hire a Cretan dialectal speaker as a salesperson.

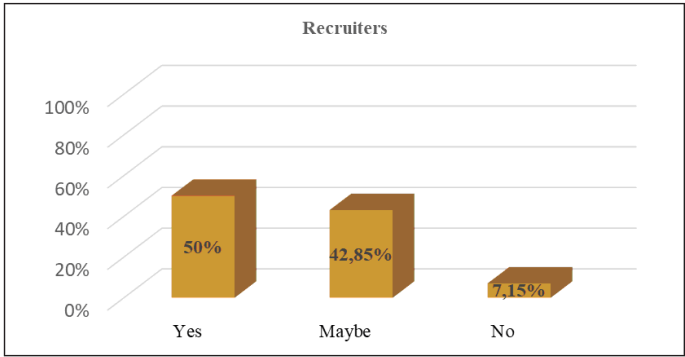


Chart 7. Hireability of a Cretan dialectal speaker as a salesperson

5. DISCUSSION

Most of the participants display a positive attitude towards the use of modern Greek dialects and disconnects them from strong and negative metapragmatic stereotypes about Greek dialects. However, we observe that the data present ambiguous language attitudes, since dialects are considered equal to the standard but only for restricted communication situations. Ultimately, participants’ attitudes tend to be influenced by the prevailing metapragmatic

stereotypes about dialects. This observation aligns with other research on the ambivalence in language attitudes towards linguistic varieties considered low prestige, such as dialects. More specifically, Holmes (2016: 489–490) analyzes the linguistic behavior of individuals who, while seeming to value non-standard varieties, they use the standard variety, as it is evaluated positively on educational and social prestige scales. Focusing on the Cypriot dialect, in Tsiplakou's (2007: 471) research on the attitudes of teachers, the findings present some contradictions, as the positive attitudes towards Cypriot are almost lifted when the issue of Cypriot dialect as a language of education is raised.

As for the use of the Cretan dialect in the sales sector, we can report some hesitations. Nevertheless, many reported that most customers react positively to a salesperson's use of the Cretan dialect. Furthermore, most participants expressed that using the dialects does not negatively affect service and sales effectiveness. The data indicate that although the metapragmatic stereotypes regarding dialects influence the participants' attitudes towards the use of dialects at working environment, the sample in this research shows positive attitudes towards the Cretan dialect. Consequently, the use of the Cretan dialect is not an obstacle for someone who wishes to work in sales. This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that most of the sample and half of the recruiters, while they strongly emphasize a salesperson's speech, would likely hire a Cretan dialectal speaker as a salesperson.

The results reveal that the Greek society is ready to accept the use of dialects, not only in everyday life communication but also in business contexts. These results contradict previous studies, which present that society still needs to assess the value of dialect education in schools (see also Tzakosta & Beteinaki 2019). Various studies have shown that even dialectal speakers do not have a steady opinion concerning the status of their mother language and the role these language varieties could play in education as vehicles of oral history and cultural heritage, even though plenty of studies have underlined the positive role of Greek language varieties in language learning and teaching. People, including language constructors, are skeptical about the use of Greek dialects in education. (Tzakosta 2014; Kapsaski & Tzakosta 2016). Thus, this view might positively affect the incorporation and use of dialects in education.

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**ΓΛΩΣΣΙΚΕΣ ΣΤΑΣΕΙΣ ΑΠΕΝΑΝΤΙ ΣΤΗΝ ΚΡΗΤΙΚΗ ΔΙΑΛΕΚΤΟ: Η ΧΡΗΣΗ ΤΗΣ ΔΙΑΛΕΚΤΟΥ
ΣΤΟΝ ΤΟΜΕΑ ΤΩΝ ΠΩΛΗΣΕΩΝ**

Περίληψη

Στόχος της παρούσας έρευνας ήταν να διερευνηθούν οι γλωσσικές στάσεις απέναντι στην κρητική διάλεκτο στον εργασιακό τομέα και να διαπιστωθεί εάν η χρήση της κρητικής διαλέκτου θα είχε ως αποτέλεσμα να μην προσληφθεί ένα άτομο για μια θέση εργασίας στον τομέα των πωλήσεων. Από τα δεδομένα που συλλέχθηκαν αποδεικνύεται ότι το δείγμα που συμμετείχε στην έρευνα παρουσιάζει θετική στάση απέναντι στη κρητική διάλεκτο, την οποία συνδέει με το ίδιο το νησί και την κουλτούρα του. Έτσι, παρόλο που οι στάσεις των ερωτηθέντων για τις διαλεκτικές ποικιλίες φαίνεται να επηρεάζονται από τα κυρίαρχα μεταπραγματολογικά στερεότυπα για τις διαλεκτικές ποικιλίες, τελικά συμπεραίνουμε ότι η διαλεκτοφωνία των κρητικών δεν αποτελεί εμπόδιο στον τομέα των πωλήσεων. Πιο αναλυτικά, αναφορικά με τη χρήση της κρητικής διαλέκτου στον τομέα των πωλήσεων, διαπιστώνεται ότι η πλειοψηφία του δείγματος, παρά τις επιφυλάξεις τους, θεωρεί ότι η κρητική διάλεκτος δεν μπορεί να επηρεάσει αρνητικά το αποτέλεσμα των πωλήσεων και της εξυπηρέτησης ενώ, παράλληλα, αναφέρεται ότι οι πελάτες αντιδρούν κυρίως θετικά στο άκουσμα της κρητικής διαλέκτου από ένα πωλητή. Επιπλέον, η πλειοψηφία των ερωτηθέντων, ενώ δίνει μεγάλη βαρύτητα στον τρόπο ομιλίας των πωλητών/σύμβουλων πωλήσεων, αν είχε τη δυνατότητα να αποφασίζει για τις προσλήψεις νέων υπαλλήλων στην εταιρεία όπου εργάζεται, θα επέλεγε ένα διαλεκτόφωνο της κρητικής διαλέκτου για μία θέση στην εταιρεία. Είναι σημαντικό, ότι συγκεντρώνεται υψηλό ποσοστό και στα άτομα που όντως έχουν αυτή την αρμοδιότητα στην εταιρεία, αποδεικνύοντας ότι η διαλεκτοφωνία των κρητικών δεν κρίνεται αρνητικά ούτε από τους υποψήφιους εργοδότες.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: κρητική διάλεκτος, γλωσσικές στάσεις, πωλήσεις, προσλήψεις