Dionysios Zoumpalidis*

Us and them: Inter- and intra-communal ethno-linguistic borders within the Pontic Greek community in Cyprus

Abstract: In this study, the ethnic self-perception of Greeks from Russia and Georgia (alternatively known as Pontic Greeks) is examined in the socio-political context of Cyprus. I analyze the concept of *mother tongue* and the potential (symbolic) role it plays within the multilingual community of Pontic Greeks in Cyprus. The study demonstrates that the majority of Pontic Greeks both from Russia and Georgia ethnically self-identify as 'Greeks' while speaking different languages. Language plays a vital role in ethnic self-identification of some Pontic Greeks while for others the link between language and ethnicity appears to be insignificant. Interestingly, the 'Greekness' of some Pontic Greeks is questioned by the local population, which appears to be sensitive to the language-ethnicity link.

Keywords: Pontic Greeks, Cyprus, mother tongue, identity, post-Soviet migration

1 Introduction

The history of Pontic Greeks dates back to the sixth–eighth century BC when the first villages appeared in the coastal area in today's north-eastern Turkey, which is also known as *Pontos* (Fotiadis 2000) (see Map 1).

People living in these areas spoke the Pontic Greek dialect (henceforth, PGD), the written evidence of which dates back to the period between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries (Drettas 2000).[1] In 1453 the conquest of the Byzantine Empire by the Ottoman Turks marked the first catalyst for migration of Pontic Greeks. The massive migratory waves, however, did not take place until

---

[1] Trudgill (2002: 125) points out that PGD today is quite different from other dialects of Greek "because of the long period of separation and in some cases because of considerable influence from other languages, notably from Turkish and other Caucasian languages".

*Corresponding author: Dionysios Zoumpalidis, Higher School of Economics, Institute of Education, Potapovsky Pereulok 16, Building 10, Office 305/1, 101000 Moscow, Russia, E-mail: dzubalov@hse.ru.

Map 1: The location of Pontos (grey arrow) and Cyprus (black arrow).
Source: http://pontian. info/maps/mapPONTO.jpg.

the start of the Russo-Turkish wars in the eighteenth century, and after the Greek revolution in 1821.

As a result, around 40,000 Pontic Greeks abandoned Pontos and settled in the area of Ts'alk'a in modern-day Georgia (see Bruneau 2000: 35–36; Fotiadis 2000: 82).[2] The vast majority of the newly arrived settlers already spoke the Turkic variety, Urum, as their dominant language.[3] Very few Pontic Greeks managed to preserve their ethnic language, PGD. Others, settled in the Krasnodar and Stavropol regions (in the northern Caucasus, Russia) bearing a similar linguistic profile. In the mid-

---

2 According to Karpozilos (1999: 138) during the period of 1856–1884 around 160,000 are "thought to have left Pontos in search of freedom and peace".

3 It must be mentioned that Urum is an eastern dialect of Turkish (both Urum and Modern Standard Turkish are mutually intelligible), and speakers of this variety are frequently referred to as *Urum* (Kolossov et al. 2000; Bruneau 2000). According to Bruneau (2000: 30) because of their Orthodox Christian religion Turcophone Pontic Greeks constituted part of the *millet Rum* whose leader was the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The term *Urum* is purely linguistic and is used only in the literature to refer to the Turkic-speaking Pontic Greeks and the Turkic variety they speak (see also Höfler, this volume) as this label has never appeared in the discourse of Pontic Greek participants in Cyprus. Taking this into account, and based on the multilingual character of the Pontic Greek community in Cyprus, it is difficult to determine which language(s) or varieties predominate in the community today and I will therefore refrain from the use of such a labels as 'Urum Pontic Greeks' and stick to a more linguistically neutral and broader term 'Pontic Greeks' instead.

1950s, a number of Pontic Greeks from Ts'alk'a moved to the towns of Essentuki and Pyatigorsk in the Mineralnye Vody region, in the northern Caucasus. Finally, the fall of the Soviet Union made it possible for thousands of Pontic Greeks, both from Russia and Georgia, to migrate to the two Greek-speaking countries Greece and/or Cyprus.

In this paper, I am going to focus on the community of Pontic Greeks who moved from Russia and Georgia to the island of Cyprus in the mid-1990s, and I will investigate the process of their settlement, ethnic self-identification, language attitudes, and the role that their mother tongue(s) plays in the community. More specifically, this study will attempt to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What role do language attitudes play in the (non)-acceptance of Pontic Greeks in the Greek-Cypriot speech community?
2. How does ethnic self-perception/self-identification of Pontic Greeks influence the process of language shift/maintenance?

The paper is structured as follows: in Section 2, I outline the main theoretical framework. Section 3 presents the methodological tools used in the study. In Section 4, I analyze and discuss the main findings. Finally, Section 5 draws concluding remarks.

2 Theoretical approach

In the present paper the theoretical framework of Ethnolinguistic Vitality (henceforth, EV) is used. The concept of EV was first introduced by Giles et al. in 1977 and since then the theory has been widely used in a number of sociolinguistic investigations: *language shift/maintenance* (Clement 1987; Giles and Johnson 1987; Yagmur et al. 1999; Yagmur and Akinci 2003; Komondouros and McEntee-Atalianis 2007; Gogonas 2009; Yagmur 2009 among many others), *language choice* (Lewin 1987), *language attitudes* (Johnson et al. 1983; McNamara 1987; Sachdev et al. 1987), *language loss* (Landry et al. 1996).

According to Giles et al. (1977: 308) EV refers to the property that "makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations". More specifically, if the group's vitality is assessed as 'high', it is believed that its members are likely to maintain their language and culture in multilingual contexts; if the group possesses 'low' vitality, however, then the chances of its members assimilating linguistically and culturally into the dominant group increase proportionally. Three main components (status, demography and institutional support) are used in the assessment of the group's vitality.

The group's vitality is largely dependent on the relative **status** of the group's language and culture. For example, in many immigrant situations, the language the newcomers speak in a host country may bear a low status and, as a consequence, the immigrants often hold negative attitudes towards their own language. This, in turn, may contribute to the decline of the immigrant group's low status language and shift to the high status, mainstream language (see, for instance, examples discussed by Appel and Muysken 1987).

Demography refers to the relative size of the group. According to Giles et al. (1977), the smaller the size of a community, the higher the chance that language shift will occur; conversely, the larger the community, the higher the chances are for that group to maintain its language. Some examples demonstrate that this factor plays an influential role in the process of language maintenance. In his study, Li (1982) showed that 3rd-generation immigrants from China in the USA residing in the so-called *China-towns* (areas compactly populated predominantly by people of Chinese origin or descent) were less likely to have adopted English as their mother tongue than their peers living outside China-towns. Thus, the phenomenon of migration and the patterns it acquires in a host country constitutes an important component in the investigation of a group's EV.

Finally, **institutional support** refers to the extent of support a language receives from various institutions. According to Giles et al. (1977) speakers have a higher chance of maintaining their language if it is used in administration, church, education, the media and for cultural purposes. One of the examples that illustrates the interdependence between language and the support it receives can be found in Agyekum's (2009) study of language shift in Ghana. Agyekum maintains that since some of the minority languages lack support in that they are not broadcast in Ghana, speakers of these languages are, therefore, more likely to assimilate toward the use of the dominant languages.

Although EV was a quite useful theoretical framework in language contact studies, it has received some criticism and, as result, some scholars conducting research in sociolinguistic theory tried to refine/extend it. More concretely, in addition to sociological and demographic information, a more subjective approach to the measurement of EV has been adopted.[4] Karan (2011), for example, proposed the 'Perceived Benefit Model of Language (Stability and)

---

4 Harwood et al. (1994: 175) argue that a group members' subjective assessment of the in-group as well as out-group vitality may be as important in determining sociolinguistic and interethnic behavior as the group's objective vitality. Therefore, 'Subjective Ethnolinguistic Vitality Questionnaire' (SEVQ) and the 'Beliefs on Ethnolinguistic Vitality Questionnaire' (BEVQ) have been introduced by Bourhis et al. (1981) and Allard and Landry (1986) respectively as the methodological instruments in the investigation and measurement of the EV.

Shift' (PBMLSS). According to his model, "individuals select from their linguistic repertoire the language variety or varieties (languages) that will best serve their interests, in particular speech environments or domains" (Karan 2011: 139). In this light, Karan (2011: 140–143) provided a taxonomy of motivations influencing language (stability and) shift:

1. Communicative motivations.
2. Economic motivations: Job-related, trade-related, network-related.
3. Social identity motivations: Prestige group-related, solidarity-related, distance-related, hero-/villain-related.
4. Language power and prestige motivations: High language forms, low language forms.
5. Nationalistic and political motivations.
6. Religious motivations: Pleasing or appeasing a greater being, language designated as sacred, access sacred writings, religious communication (proselytizing) purposes.[5]

Finally, I introduced the factor of 'Provenance' (Zoumpalidis 2014) arguing that one's link to his/her country of origin (in the context of immigration) plays an important role in the process of language shift and integration/assimilation strategies adopted. More specifically, I am suggesting that the participants' country of origin may exercise some influence on the group's EV, depending on a number of objective features (e. g. economic, political, cultural and national pride among other) that, in turn, have the potential to evoke some subjective features (e. g. positive/negative attitudes towards the country of origin, (dis) association with the country of origin and wish to return home). Thus, members of the same community whose origin was from two different countries demonstrated distinct behavior as regards a number of sociolinguistic aspects.

3 Research methodology

In the present study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to collect the data. In total, 291 participants of Pontic Greek origin from Russia (n = 152) and Georgia (n = 139) (only 1st wave migrants) took part in the study. All the participants were divided into four age groups: a. 10–25; b. 26–35; c. 36–50; d. 51 + .

---

5 For a detailed account of these individual motivations within the broader categories described in the taxonomy of motivation, see Karan (2011: 140–143).

The quantitative part of the study consisted of 247 questionnaires (127 of the participants were from Russia: 66 male and 61 female; and 120 from Georgia: 64 male and 56 female). The questionnaire was divided into four parts and consisted of 54 questions (both closed- and open-ended). A Likert scale was also included in the questionnaire which made it possible to measure the degree of a particular sociolinguistic feature. Some data in the questionnaire were subject to statistical analysis. The questions in the questionnaire were designed to elicit, as precisely as possible, demographic and sociolinguistic information of the Pontic Greek community in Cyprus, their social networks, and the degree of bilingualism (multilingualism). In addition, language attitudes as well as the nature of the relationship between language and (ethnic/national) identity were examined.

Interviews lie at the core of the qualitative data. The questions found in the questionnaire constitute the basis for the interview. In addition, five open-ended and semi-open questions were included in the interview, which were intended to trigger a more in-depth discussion. It should be mentioned that the majority of the interviews were conducted at the participants' houses/flats. It was important that the feeling of comfort of interviewees' homes as well as the psychological safety of their own space created favorable conditions for them to talk freely and unconditionally, a fact which contributed considerably to the reduction of the 'observer's paradox' phenomenon. It should be pointed out that my personal ethnic background and my experience as a first generation Pontic Greek immigrant to Cyprus (from Russia but born in Georgia) facilitated to a large extent access to the community and its members, the vast majority of whom willingly gave their consent to take part in the study. In total, 44 (40 one-on-one and 4 group) interviews were conducted (25 came from Russia and 19 from Georgia). The shortest interview lasted for around 21 minutes and the longest for approximately 1 hour and 36 minutes.

4 Results and discussion

Language shift can be triggered by a number of socio-political, socio-economic and/or linguistic factors that can be characterized as either internal or external. According to Hoffmann (1991: 187), language shift is the process of abandoning one language in favor of another, which can last for several generations when a particular "language is spoken by fewer and fewer people until it is no longer spoken by any member of that community". Following the theoretical framework of EV, the external factors that lead to language shift in the Pontic Greek community are: Institutional support (or lack thereof), migration (demographic factors) and status.

As is shown in Figure 1 (below), the community of Pontic Greeks in Cyprus has all the elements of a multilingual community, in so far as at least three languages are frequently used: Russian, Standard Modern Greek (henceforth, SMG) and Urum. All the participants reported having knowledge of both Russian and SMG (100 %). For many (especially older) Pontic Greeks, the Russian language was the language of education and employment, and even their mother tongue (see Table 1, below) in the Soviet Union. It is therefore not surprising that every Pontic Greek from the former Soviet Union is proficient (at least to the extent of basic comprehension/communication) in Russian. Similarly, every participant reported knowing SMG, as it – along with the Cypriot Greek Dialect (henceforth, CGD) – is the primary language used in everyday life situations in Cyprus. As for Urum, in spite of a relatively high number of Pontic Greeks reporting knowledge of this variety (almost 86 %, see Figure 1, below), it is currently undergoing a rapid decline within the community in question. There are a number of reasons accounting for this situation. In Figure 1, the participants were asked to: "Circle the languages (dialects) you know".
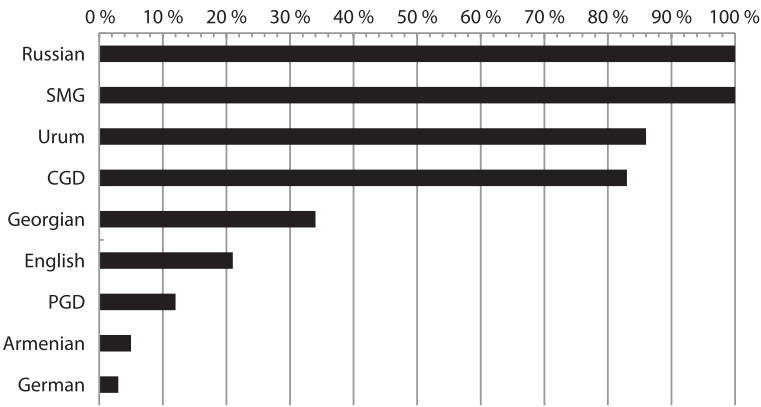

Figure 1: The languages (dialects) Pontic Greek participants reported to know.[6]

---

6 See Figures 5 and 6 in Appendix for the languages (dialects) the participants from Russia and Georgia reported to know. Both Figures exhibit a similar trend with the exception that the number of Pontic Greek participants from Georgia who reported to know Georgian and Urum is higher. This can be explained by the fact that the region of Ts'alk'a is relatively isolated, and hence, Urum was the main medium of everyday communication of Pontic Greeks that used to reside in those areas.

First, the institutional support in Cyprus for Urum is simply nonexistent. Support for the Turkish language is extremely minimal. In spite of the fact that the island's constitution contains two official languages, SMG and Turkish, in fact only SMG is widely used in practically every domain: administration, politics, education and in other spheres of social life.[7] Second, the migration effects forced the newcomers to start acquiring SMG (along with CGD) in order to be able to find employment, while the vast majority of their children were sent to the local Greek-speaking public schools. As far as language and labor are concerned, it is important to take into consideration Karan's (2011: 140–143) taxonomy of economic motivations. Within the framework of the PBMLSS model, the process of language shift is considered to be *job-related*. Therefore, in this situation, language shift is primarily dictated by the need to obtain or maintain employment. This could be taken as an implication that one (or more) of the community's language(s) is (are) being abandoned in favor of another, more powerful language(s) which can potentially offer wider economic opportunities. Finally, the factor of status appears to have a serious impact on the process of language shift as well. In order to better understand what status Urum occupies in Cyprus today, it is necessary to look at the position of the Turkish language from a socio-historical perspective.

In 1974, Cyprus was invaded by the Turkish army (see also fn. 7) and occupied around 37 % of the island's territory. As a result, thousands of Greek-Cypriots lost their property in the northern areas of the island. Furthermore, the tensions between the two communities intensified and were accompanied by a series of tragic events that led to the death of Greek-Cypriots in the Buffer Zone in the mid-1990s. It was precisely during this period that the major influx of Urum-speaking Pontic Greeks to Cyprus was taking place. Pontic Greeks, either being unaware of or negligent to the Turkish problem in Cyprus, spoke Urum in public places, a fact which frequently caused negative feelings among Greek-Cypriots. Papapavlou and Pavlou (2005) suggest that speaking a particular language triggers one's beliefs about the members of the corresponding speech community. In this light, taking into account high sensitivity to the link between language and ethnic identity,[8] local Greek-Cypriots do not seem to be willing to recognize the 'Greekness' of those Pontic Greeks who speak a language which is highly reminiscent of the Turkish language (see also Karoulla-Vrikki 2004).

---

7 It must be noted that there were two communities (Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot) in Cyprus before the Turkish invasion in 1974, which divided the island into two halves: The northern part (predominantly populated by Turkish-Cypriots and Turkish settlers from mainland Turkey) and the southern part (predominantly populated by Greek-Cypriots).

8 This link is important for religious purposes as well.

Under these circumstances, internal factors affecting language shift can be observed: namely, Pontic Greeks started distancing themselves from the use of Urum. This is particularly reflected in the participants' reported language use patterns. In Figure 2, the participants were asked to answer the following question: "What language(s) do you speak to your children at home?"[9]
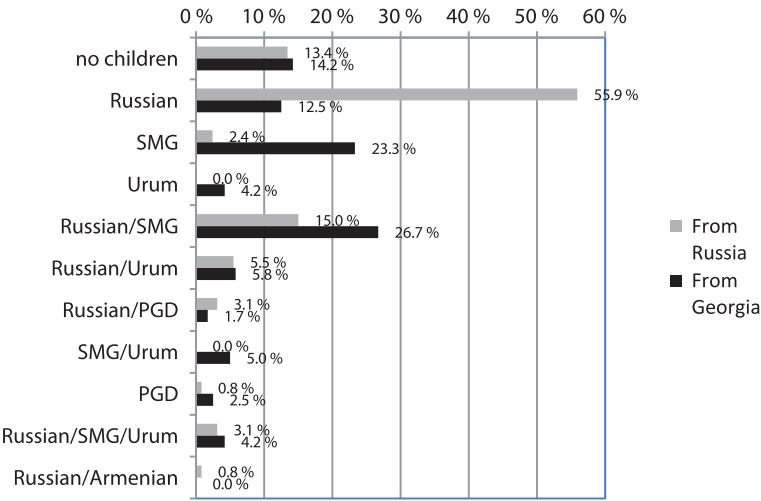

Figure 2: Language(s) (dialect(s)) Pontic Greek parents reported to use when they address their children.

As is illustrated in Figure 2, only 4.2 % of Pontic Greek parents from Georgia, and none from Russia use Urum when they address their children. This linguistic behavior is indicative of the conscious language choice patterns Pontic Greek parents have chosen to follow. It should be stressed, however, that respondents reported Urum as being used alongside Russian and/or SMG. Nonetheless, the number of these participants is insignificant (not exceeding 6 % in each case). In this regard, it becomes evident that Pontic Greeks have become more linguistically aware of the potential social and economic damage that the use of Urum in Cyprus may cause. In this respect, Karan (2011: 139) argues that

> When individuals perceive that the use of, or association with, a language is toxic to their personal good, they will not only stop using that language, they will also often cognitively, socially and emotively distance themselves from that language so that it becomes less and less part of their linguistic repertoire.

---

9 It should be noted that this question is not applicable to those participants who reported that they did not to have any children.

Thus, on the one hand, Pontic Greeks started avoiding the use of Urum (at least in public places) so as not to trigger negative emotions among the local population, and on the other hand, they are trying to use more SMG in their attempt to construct and exhibit their ethnic identity through linguistic behavior. This could be seen as a signal to the out-group majority that they belong to the Greek culture and the Greek world. In Figure 3, the participants were asked the following question: "Who do you feel you are?"
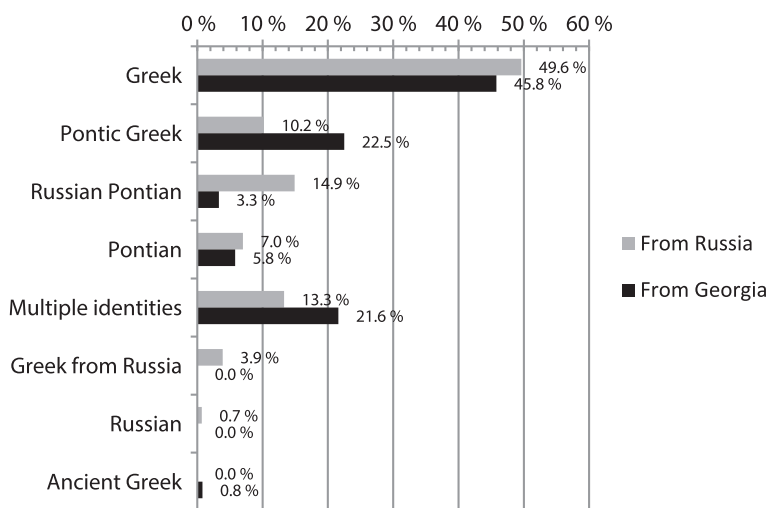

Figure 3: Ethnic labels Pontic Greek participants self-ascribed.

As the evidence in Figure 3 shows, almost half of the participants, from Russia and Georgia reported to be 'Greeks'. This suggests that these participants not only feel they are Greeks but also wish that others would view them in this way. Noteworthy is the fact that none of the participants self-ascribed a Turkish or Urum identity, despite the fact that nearly 86 % of the participants reported knowledge of Urum (see Figure 1). The Russian element of one's identity can be traced in the ethnic labels when it comes to self-identification as reflected in such labels as 'Russian Pontian' and 'Greek from Russia'. It could be taken as an indication that these participants try to retain the Russian element of their identity as Greeks. This could also mean that these participants wish to distance themselves from other Greeks, either local Greek-Cypriots, or those from mainland Greece or even those from their own community.

What is of interest is that there is a relatively large variation in the way Pontic Greeks use ethnic labels. This seems to suggest that the community itself

has not come to identify and define itself as a unified entity. What is more, some ethnic labels are even vehemently rejected, as can be seen in the interview excerpt with a Pontic Greek woman, Zoya, from Russia, aged 51:

Interview 1. (the original interview was conducted in Russian in the city of Nicosia, in 2011)

ДЗ: Такой вопрос, кем ты себя ощущаешь?
З: Гречанка.
ДЗ: Только гречанка?
З: Нет...греко-русская (смех)
ДЗ: Россо-понтия?
З: О Боже, нет! Греко-русская.
ДЗ: Греко-русская?
З: Греко-русская, только не понтийка!
DZ: I've got a question, who do you feel you are?
Z: Greek.
DZ: Only Greek?
Z: No...Greek-Russian (laughter)
DZ: Russian Pontian?
Z: Oh God, no! Greek-Russian.
DZ: Greek-Russian?
Z: Greek-Russian, but not Pontian!

Zoya, initially ethnically self-identified as 'Greek' but later changes the self-ascribed label to 'Greek-Russian', rejecting the proposed labels 'Russian-Pontian' and 'Pontian'. This behavior strongly suggests that defining an ethnic identity can be a fluid process, and that it often may not be simple. The proposed multiple identity 'Greek-Russian' – or what McEntee-Atalianis (2011) calls 'ethnic hybrid identity' – has probably emerged to combine Zoya's ethnic identity with the place of her origin. It appears that Zoya's place of origin – where she was raised, educated, and acquired cultural values – plays an important role in her ethnic self-identification. The choice of a particular ethnic label can therefore be seen as a manifestation of the participant's wish to preserve her 'national heritage' at the level of her ethnicity. This particular behavior could also be taken as a demonstration of Zoya's disassociation from other Greeks: mainland Greeks, Greek-Cypriots, and Pontic Greeks (or Pontians), a label which has obtained a negative connotation in Cyprus (see Zoumpalidis 2014 for more information).

One of the factors that could play a role in the heterogeneous character of the Pontic Greek community in Cyprus is the participants' place of origin. Pontic Greeks who arrived in Cyprus from Russia and those from Georgia exhibit different patterns when it comes to their integration strategies in the host country.

This is particularly visible in the language choice patterns of Pontic Greek parents when speaking with their children (see Figure 2, above). Nearly 56 % of Pontic Greeks from Russia prefer to address their children exclusively in the Russian language, whereas two language use trends stand out for the participants from Georgia: the exclusive use of SMG (23 %) and a combination of Russian and SMG (27 %). It should be stressed that analogous language behavior was found to be considerably less popular among Pontic Greek parents from Russia (2.4 % and 15 % respectively). It is therefore not surprising that the younger generation of Pontic Greeks is fluent in SMG, which is evidenced in Figure 4.
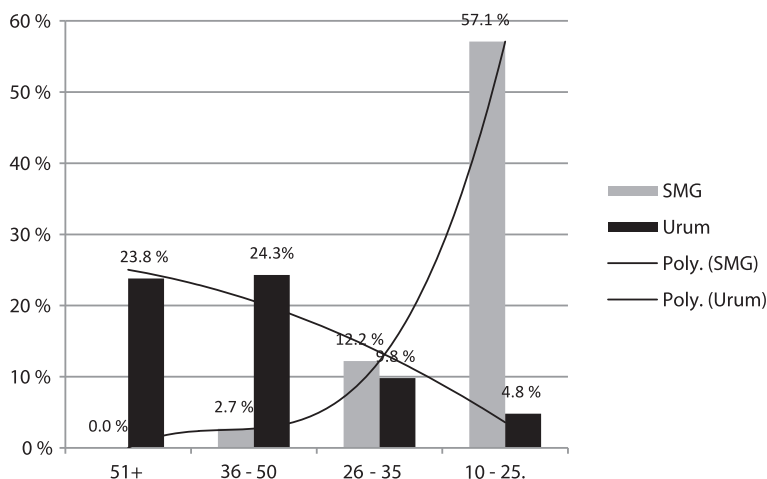

Figure 4: Urum (black column) and SMG (grey column) that the participants from Georgia reported to use when they address their siblings (divided by age groups) (Question: "What language(s) do you speak to your siblings at home?").[10]

The declining trend of Urum concerning sibling communication, as the polynominal line indicates in Figure 4, is characteristic of language shift, which is particularly visible through the remarkable rise of SMG-speakers among the younger generation. This highlights the increasing trend in the use of SMG.

The notion of *mother tongue* can also play an important role in the participants' ethnic self-identification. It should be noted that a number of different definitions of mother tongue have been used in sociolinguistic research, and there is no consensus

---

10 Note the remarkably different pattern of language use related to SMG and Urum that Pontic Greek participants from Russia employ when they address their siblings as illustrated in Figure 7, in Appendix. Most participants from Russia prefer to exclusively use the Russian language when they address their siblings: 58.2 % or both Russian and Urum: 12.5 %.

among sociolinguists with regard to what definition should universally be used. In the present study, the term *mother tongue* is used to denote the language one feels to be his/her mother tongue, irrespective of whether this language is his/her dominant language (i. e. the language one speaks best) or not. In Table 1, the participants were asked the following question: "What is your mother tongue?"

Table 1: Languages reported as mother tongue(s) (numbers in %).

Country of origin	Russian	SMG	PGD	Urum	Russian/ SMG	Russian/ Urum	Russian/ SMG/Urum	SMG/ Urum	Other
Russia	61.4	21.3	2.4	0.8	8.7	4.7	0	0	0.8
Georgia	35	33.3	4.2	9.2	7.5	4.2	2.5	2.5	1.6

As the evidence in Table 1 illustrates, more than half of the participants from Russia identified Russian as their mother tongue (slightly more than 61 %), double the number of participants from Georgia who identified Russian (35 %). At the same time, nearly one third of the participants from Georgia (33.3) and 21.3 % from Russia reported to have SMG as their mother tongue.

In folk traditions, it is often believed that one's origins can frequently be identified by the type of the language (or language variety) he/she speaks. In this light, taking into account that language can often function as a prime indicator of one's ethnic identity (Fishman 1997; Fought 2002; McEntee-Atalianis 2011), mother tongue in some cases is taken to highlight one's ethnic allegiance. Thus, a potential symbolic load of a particular mother tongue can arise especially if the participants are trying to identify with a particular ethnicity/culture/ nationality/language. By looking at the participants' reported dominant languages it becomes obvious that certain languages chosen as mother tongues do not coincide with the ones the participants reported to be proficient in. In Table 2, the participants were asked the following question: "In what language do you feel you can express yourself (speak) more easily?"

Table 2: Dominant language(s) of the participants (numbers in %).

Country of origin	Russian	SMG	Urum	Russian/ SMG	Russian/ Urum	Russian/ PGD	SMG/ Urum	PGD	Other
Russia	74.8	10.2	3.9	3.9	5.5	0.8	0	0	0.8
Georgia	38.3	23.3	18.3	3.3	10	1.7	1.7	0.8	2.5

Comparing the data in Tables 1 and 2, the differences are particularly noticeable with regard to SMG and Urum, though in a different way. Specifically, the number

of participants both from Russia and Georgia who identified SMG as their mother tongue is larger in comparison to those shown in Table 2 (by 11.1 % and 10 % respectively). This implies that these participants (not speaking SMG as their dominant language), by reporting SMG as their mother tongue, wish to be associated with the Greek culture and language. In other words, it can be taken as a projection of the participants' identity in a situation when they are not (very) proficient in SMG. And this phenomenon is probably applicable to the older generation of Pontic Greeks in a situation when their first-learned and/or dominant language is one other than SMG. Thus, it can be argued that SMG claimed as mother tongue acquires a symbolic value.

Similarly, but in the opposite direction, considerable differences are observed with respect to Russian and Urum. As regards the Russian language, the numbers do not vary much compared to those in relation to Urum found in Tables 1 and 2. This suggests that a number of people do not wish to consider Urum as their mother tongue precisely because it might, in some way, link them to the Turkish culture and/or identity. In this respect, Hoffmann (1991: 181) points out that the individual's "desire to identify with, or dissociate from, a particular language group can be a determining factor in language choice". In other words, Pontic Greeks wish to be associated with the Greek language, culture and identity by getting rid of their old identity, which to some extent is loaded with Turkish elements. To sum up, the language choices Pontic Greeks make, along with their language behavior patterns, as indicated in Figures 2 and 4, and in Tables 1 and 2, have to be taken as an indication of the general language shift taking place in the community in question.

Finally, the observable differences that stem from the participants' respective country of origin (either Russia or Georgia) suggest that the community of Pontic Greeks is heterogeneous with regard to the members' linguistic profile, language transmission patterns and (the symbolic role of) mother tongue. It appears that Pontic Greeks from Russia, recognizing and declaring their Greekness, are nonetheless more reluctant to integrate/assimilate into the dominant Cypriot-Greek culture. The strategy these participants employ could be accounted for in terms of the perceived influence of the country of their origin and their awareness of the value of the educational and cultural capital that they brought with them to Cyprus, which they apparently wish to preserve. Pontic Greeks from Georgia, on the other hand, who do not place such a high value on the Georgian language[11] and are Urum-speaking in their majority at the time of their arrival in Cyprus, make active attempts to distance themselves from the language of their home country and from any Turkish-influenced cultural

---

11 This is probably due to the fact that in the Soviet times the Georgian language was taught superficially or was not taught at all (cf. Melikishvili and Jalabadze, this volume).

elements in order to avoid any association with the Turks. They do this not only within the mainstream community of Greek-Cypriots, but also within the Pontic Greek community itself.

5 Conclusion

The present paper sought to shed light on the type and the process of ethnolinguistic borders that are being (de)constructed inside and outside the Pontic Greek community in Cyprus. The negative language attitudes of local Greek-Cypriots towards Turkish (and consequently towards Urum) led them to question the very Greek nature of the Urum-speaking Pontic Greeks. It was argued that language shift within the Pontic Greek community is in progress, which could partly be attributed to the community's increasing sociolinguistic awareness of the socio-political situation in Cyprus. However, the major driving force towards language shift is the desire of Pontic Greeks to see their community as *Greek* (and be recognized as such by the out-group majority). It was argued that Pontic Greeks are trying to distance themselves from the previous form of their community, which was characterized by a heavy influence from Urum and Turkish cultural elements. As a result, the community seems to be acquiring its ethnic ontological essence after having been immersed in the Greek cultural and linguistic environment of Cyprus shortly after its settlement on the island in the mid-1990s. However, it should be pointed out that it is precisely the broader Greek, and not the Greek-Cypriot, component that the Pontic Greek community aspires to.

Likewise, it has been shown that the community of Pontic Greeks in Cyprus is to a large extent heterogeneous. This can be attributed to a variety of reasons. The analysis of the group's EV revealed that the country the participants migrated from has the potential to influence their patterns of linguistic behavior. More specifically, Pontic Greeks recognizing and highlighting their common Greek descent exhibit different linguistic trajectories and integration/assimilation strategies. In light of this fact, it was argued that the process of integration of Pontic Greeks from Georgia into mainstream society is taking place more quickly. This process is augmented by a strong sense of national patriotism expressed by their adherence to their ethnicity, their origin as Greeks, their Greek culture, and their distance from Urum. This process of integration is accompanied by the respective language use patterns where the Greek language (SMG) plays a central role. Pontic Greeks from Russia, on the other hand, seem to keep the national traits of their country of origin, which are reflected in their reluctance to linguistically integrate into Greek-Cypriot society, thus preserving Russian as the home language and, more importantly, treating it as their mother tongue.
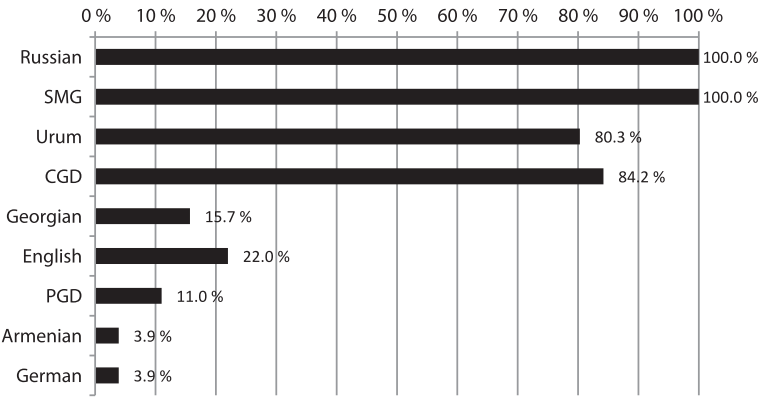
Appendix

Figure 5: Pontic Greeks from Russia: "Circle the languages (dialects) you know" (numbers in %).
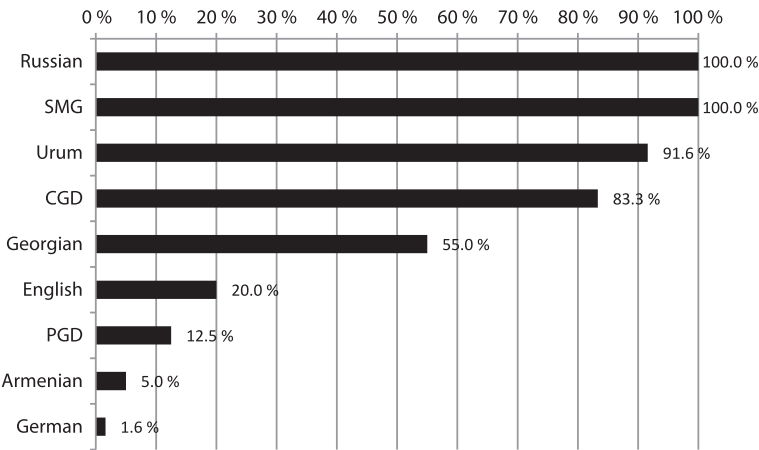

Figure 6: Pontic Greeks from Georgia: "Circle the languages (dialects) you know" (numbers in %).
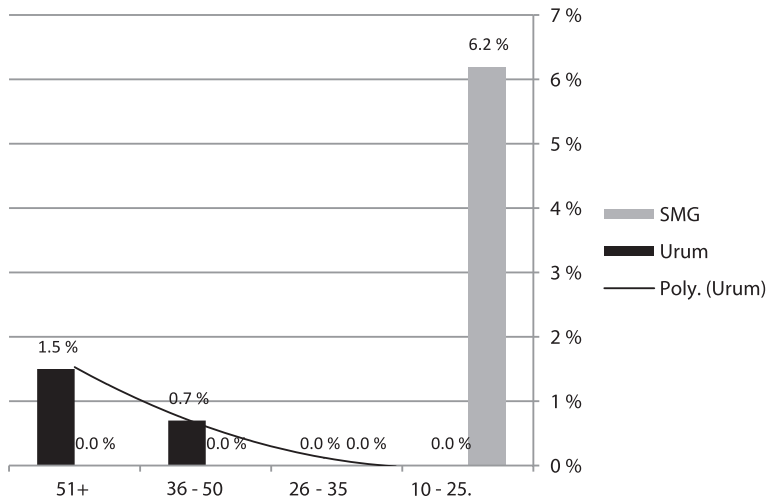
Figure 7: Urum (black column) and SMG (grey column) that the participants from Russia reported to use when they address their siblings (divided by age groups) (Question: "What language(s) do you speak to your siblings at home?").

References

Agyekum, Kofi. 2009. Language shift: A case study of Ghana. *Sociolinguistic Studies* 3(3). 381–403.

Allard, Real & Rodrigue Landry. 1986. Subjective ethnolinguistic vitality viewed as a belief system. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 7. 1–12.

Appel, Rene & Pieter Muysken. 1987. *Language contact and bilingualism*. London: Edward Arnold.

Bourhis, Richard Y., Howard Giles & Doreen Rosenthal. 1981. Notes on the construction of a 'Subjective Vitality Questionnaire' for ethnolinguistic groups. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 2(2). 145–155.

Bruneau, Michel. 2000. Η διασπορά του Ποντιακού Ελληνισμού και οι Έλληνες της πρώην ΕΣΣΔ, η εδαφική σχέση. In Michel Bruneau (ed.), *Η Διασπορά του Ποντιακού Ελληνισμού,* 27–50. Θεσσαλονίκη: Ηρόδοτος.

Clement, Richard. 1987. Second language proficiency and acculturation: An investigation of the effects of language status and individual characteristics. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 5(4). 271–291.

Drettas, George. 2000. Η ποντιακή *γλώσσα* ως αντικείμενο ταυτότητας: Ερωτήματα αναπαράστασης. In Michel Bruneau (ed.), *Η Διασπορά του Ποντιακού Ελληνισμού,* 93–118. Θεσσαλονίκη: Ηρόδοτος.

Fishman, Joshua. 1997. Language and ethnicity: The view from within. In Florian Coulmas (ed.), *The handbook of sociolinguistics*, 327–343. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Fotiadis, Konstantinos. 2000. Οι Έλληνες της πρώην ΕΣΣΔ: Η *γέννηση* της διασποράς. In Michel Bruneau (ed.), *Η Διασπορά του Ποντιακού Ελληνισμού,* 65–92. Θεσσαλονίκη: Ηρόδοτος.

Fought, Carmen. 2002. Ethnicity. In Jack Chambers, Peter Trudgill & Natalie Schilling-Estes (eds.), *The handbook of language variation and change,* 444–472. Oxford: Blackwell.

Giles, Howard, Richard Y. Bourhis & Donald M. Taylor. 1977. Towards a theory of language in ethnic group relations. In Howard Giles (ed.), *Language, ethnicity and intergroup relations*, 307–349. London: Academic Press.

Giles, Harwood & Patricia Johnson. 1987. Ethnolinguistic identity theory: A social psychological approach to language maintenance. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 68. 69–99.

Gogonas, Nikos. 2009. Language shift in second generation Albanian immigrants in Greece. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 30. 95–110.

Harwood, Jake, Howard Giles & Richard Y. Bourhis. 1994. The genesis of vitality theory: Historical patterns and discoursal dimensions. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 108. 167–206.

Hoffmann, Charlotte. 1991. *An introduction to bilingualism*. London: Longman.

Höfler, Concha Maria. this volume. Group belonging beyond language boundaries. Language, religion and identity in the multilingual Greek community of Georgia.

Johnson, Patricia, Howard Giles & Richard Y. Bourhis. 1983. The viability of ethnolinguistic vitality: A reply. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 4. 255–269.

Karan, E. Mark 2011. Understanding and forecasting ethnolinguistic vitality. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Developmen* 32(2). 137–149.

Karoulla-Vrikki, Dimitra. 2004. Language and ethnicity in Cyprus under the British: A linkage of heightened salience. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 168(1). 19–36.

Karpozilos, Apostolos. 1999. The Greeks in Russia. In Richard Clogg (ed.), *The Greek diaspora in the twentieth century*, 137–157. Oxford: Macmillan/St. Antony's College.

Kolossov, Vladimir, Tamara Galkina & Alexei Krindatch. 2000. 'Οι Έλληνες της νότιας Ρωσίας και του Καυκάσου: Εποικισμός, κατανομή, χωροταξία'. In Michel Bruneau (ed.), *Η Διασπορά του Ποντιακού Ελληνισμού,* 121–146. Θεσσαλονίκη: Ηρόδοτος (Thessaloniki: Irodotos).

Komondouros, Markos & Lisa McEntee-Atalianis. 2007. Language attitudes, shift and the ethnolinguitic vitality of the Greek-Orthodox community in Istanbul. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 28. 365–384.

Landry, Rodrigue, Real Allard & Jacques Henry. 1996. French in South Louisiana: Towards language loss. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 17(6). 442–468.

Lewin, A. Beverly 1987. Attitudinal aspects of immigrants' choice of home language. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 8(4). 361–378.

Li, Wen Lang. 1982. The language shift in Chinese Americans. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 38. 109–24.

McEntee-Atalianis, Lisa. 2011. The value of adopting multiple approaches and methodologies in the investigation of ethnolinguistic vitality. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 32(2). 151–167.

McNamara, Tim. 1987. Language and social identity: Israelis abroad. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 6(3/4). 215–228.

Melikishvili, Liana & Natia Jalabadze. this volume. The issue of ethnic identity and aspects of cross-cultural orientation of the Greeks in Georgia (on the example of Ts'alk'a Greeks).

Papapavlou, Andreas & Pavlos Pavlou. 2005. Literacy and language-in-education policy in bidialectal settings. *Current Issues in Language Planning* 6(2). 164–181.

Sachdev, Itesh, Richard Y. Bourhis, Sue-wen Phang, & John D'Eye. 1987. Language attitudes and vitality perceptions: Intergenerational effects amongst Chinese Canadian communities. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 6(3/4). 287–307.

Trudgill, Peter. 2002. *Sociolinguistic variation and change.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Yagmur, Kutlay. 2009. Language use and ethnolinguistic vitality of Turkish compared with the Dutch in the Netherlands. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 30(3). 219–233.

Yagmur, Kutlay, Kees de Bot & Hubert Korzilius. 1999. Language attrition, language shift and ethnolinguistic vitality of Turkish in Australia. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 20(1). 51–69.

Yagmur, Kutlay & Mehmet-Ali Akinci. 2003. Language use, choice, maintenance and ethnolinguistic vitality of Turkish speakers in France: Intergenerational differences. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 164. 107–128.

Zoumpalidis, Dionysios. 2014. A sociolinguistic investigation of the processes of language shift/language maintenance: The case of Pontic Greeks in Cyprus. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. University of Cyprus.