

CHANGING ATTITUDES: RECONSIDERING THE ROLE OF TURKISH  
IN THE COMMUNITY OF PONTIC GREEKS IN CYPRUS

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**Abstract**

The present paper examines the linguistic behaviour of the first wave of Pontic Greek immigrants to Cyprus based on their internalized language attitudes and dominant language ideologies. Since the time of its settlement in Cyprus in the early/mid 1990s, the predominantly Turkish-speaking community of Pontic Greeks has experienced a rapid linguistic and cultural transformation. This occurred primarily due to the local population's (i.e. Greek-Cypriots') reluctance to recognize the Turkish-speaking Pontic Greeks as belonging to the Greek linguistic and cultural 'world' in light of the former's historical and socio-political tensions with the Turkish-Cypriot minority. More specifically, I will analyse the factors that have contributed to this rapid language shift and show what (non-) linguistic means are employed by the members of the Pontic Greek community to index their ethnic identity and belonging.

**I. Introduction**

The tightly-knit community of immigrant Pontic Greeks in Cyprus numbers 25,000 to 30,000 out of a total island population of nearly 839,000 (Census 2011). The first Pontic Greek immigrants to Cyprus, who arrived in the early to mid-1990s, spoke a variety of Turkish as their first language (L1), and although many of them also spoke Russian, their Greek skills were poor. Only twenty years later, Turkish speech has contracted even in the domestic sphere, and while Russian has been retained, Greek has gained ground.

The community of Pontic Greeks has mainly been studied from a historical perspective (see Karpozilos 1999, Bruneau 2000, Eloeva 2000 and Fotiadis 2000, among others), while limited research has been conducted from a sociolinguistic perspective (see Melikishvili and Jalabadze 2016, Höfler 2016 for anthropological and linguistic anthropological approaches to the study of

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the Pontic Greeks, mainly in the Tsalka region of Georgia). The aim of this article is therefore twofold: (1) to fill in this gap in the existing literature on Pontic Greek sociolinguistics; and (2) to investigate how the language attitudes and language ideologies of Pontic Greeks towards the Turkish variety spoken in the community have triggered the rapid linguistic and cultural transformation of the community in question.

## **II. Theoretical considerations**

Language ideology and language attitudes form the theoretical framework for the analysis of the data. Following Woolard's (1992: 235) definition of language ideology, based on Silverstein (1987), 'language ideology' refers to a shared body of common-sense notions – seen as expressions of a collective order – about the nature of language, the nature and purpose of communication and appropriate communicative behaviour. According to Tollefson (2007: 26), this means that 'the ways human societies communicate both reflect and shape fundamental assumptions about individuals as members of collective identities.'

Ryan et al. (1982: 7) define language attitudes as 'any affective, cognitive or behavioural index of evaluative reactions toward different language varieties or their speakers'. Fasold (1984: 148) broadens the definition of language attitudes further by arguing that all sorts of behaviour concerning language can be investigated, including attitudes toward language maintenance and planning efforts. It is this interpretation of language attitudes in tandem with language ideology that constitutes the theoretical basis in this paper. Since attitudes are 'socially-structured and socially-structuring phenomena' (Garret, Coupland and Williams 2003: 5; see also Sherif and Sherif 1967), this method can provide the tools to analyse and explain why Turkish speech has contracted in favour of Greek within the Pontic Greek community.

## **III. Methodology**

The present study uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods and analyses. A questionnaire was used as the main methodological instrument for collecting quantifiable data. Interviews were used as a supplementary methodological tool for obtaining qualitative data. In addition, ethnographic observations of cultural events and celebrations offered an insight into the patterns of actual language use. This synthesis of methods provided a more complete picture of the research object.

As a researcher and a member of the Pontic Greek community, I attempted to make observations as objectively as possible while gaining access to the information the participants

provided (though instances of bias cannot be excluded). From 2009 to 2012, I regularly attended two celebration centres owned by Pontic Greek businessmen: ‘Σπάρτακος’ (Spartan), located in Nicosia, and ‘Αγαπητός’ (Beloved) (previously known as ‘Καύκασος’ or Caucasus, a name which is still used unofficially by a large number of Pontic Greeks), located on the outskirts of Nicosia. Both are specifically targeted at Pontic Greek customers and where various festivities, such as weddings, christenings, birthdays, Christmas and New Year parties, are celebrated. In particular, I observed behaviour patterns, traditions, types of music, songs and other cultural specificities, as well as guests’ language practices, including language selection when proposing a toast. Similarly, I attended various celebrations such as the annual national celebration of the Greek day of independence on 25<sup>th</sup> March. It should be stressed that my ethnic background and my experience as a first-generation Pontic Greek immigrant to Cyprus (from Russia but born in Georgia) greatly facilitated my access to the Pontic Greek community in Cyprus, most of whose members were eager to take part in the study.

In total, 291 Pontic Greeks from the former Soviet Union (mostly from the north and south Caucasus area) participated in the study. The quantitative part of the study consisted of 247 questionnaires. The participants were divided into four age groups: 10-25 years old, 26-35 years old, 36-50 years old and over 51 years old. The questionnaire was divided into four parts and consisted of 54 questions in total. Qualitative data consist of 44 semi-structured interviews (40 one-to-one and four group interviews). The questions 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. The respondents were offered Russian or Standard Modern Greek (henceforth SMG) as the preferred languages for the interview, these being the two languages that *all* the participants reported knowing (see Figure 1). My limited knowledge of Turkish did not allow me to offer this language for oral interviewing (the written questionnaires would not have been useful in Turkish anyway, since the overwhelming majority, if not all, of the members of the Pontic Greek community are illiterate in Turkish). However, in general, all generations (younger, middle and older) showed a preference for answering the questionnaire in Russian (some younger participants opted for the questionnaire written in SMG). The majority of the participants felt comfortable using Russian and/or SMG in interviews in so far as nearly 84% of them identified with Russian and/or SMG as their mother tongue(s), while the remainder reported being good or very good speakers of the languages in question. In a similar (qualitative) study, Höfler (2016), when investigating the interrelationship between language and identity in the Pontic Greek community of Georgia, used

Russian as the main medium of communication with her Turkish- and Pontic Greek-speaking respondents (see also Loladze 2016, also Popov 2010, who also resorted to the Russian language in the investigation of the Pontic-Greek and Turkish-speaking Pontic Greek community in Georgia and Russia, respectively). In the present article, pseudonyms are used instead of the informants' real names.

#### **IV. Results and discussion**

There are different factors that contribute to a community's shift away from one (or more) of its languages, and they normally fall into two categories: internal and external. We shall look accordingly at the factors that have led the community of Pontic Greeks to shift collectively away from the Turkish variety that was until recently the main intra-communal means of communication (see Figure 1). This variety of Turkish is often referred to as *Urum*, as, often, are its speakers: it is an eastern dialect of Turkish, which is mutually intelligible with Standard Modern Turkish (Kolossof et al. 2000; Bruneau 2000). In this article, I will use the term 'Turkish-speaking Pontic Greeks' and 'Turkish' to refer solely to the Pontic Greek context and the Turkish variety the Pontic Greeks speak, while 'Standard Modern Turkish' will be used to refer to the standard variety of Turkish spoken in present-day Turkey.

As for the external factors in this case, these include the current status of Standard Modern Turkish (henceforth SMT) in Cyprus, and the language attitudes of the out-group majority (i.e. Greek-Cypriots) towards SMT. As for the internal factors, the language attitudes of Pontic Greeks towards Turkish will be examined, along with their ethnic self-perception as representatives of Greek culture. In a recent ethnographic study, Charalambous et al. (2016), investigating Turkish linguistic identities in a highly diverse Greek-Cypriot classroom and the use of Turkish in educational settings, found that the request to prove one's competence in Turkish in a public performance produced emotional resistance among primary school students. In other words, language ideologies that stigmatize the Turkish language had long been rooted in Greek-Cypriot society and led to Turkish-speaking students experiencing difficulties in formal contexts such as a classroom or in front of a teacher as far as their competence in Turkish. Charalambous et al. insightfully demonstrated students' heightened sense of the negative indexicalities and stigma associated with speaking Turkish, especially in cases when students suppressed any indication of their 'Turkishness'.

The community of Pontic Greeks forms a multilingual community in so far as nine languages, including the Cypriot-Greek dialect (henceforth CGD) and the Pontic-Greek dialect

(henceforth PGD), were reported to exist in the linguistic repertoires of my participants. However, only four languages (dialects) seem to be the most popular (above 80%) within the community: Russian, SMG, Turkish and CGD. However, this does not mean that all four languages (dialects) are in active use. Figure 1 shows the languages (dialects) that the members of the Pontic Greek community reported knowing, but not necessarily speaking:

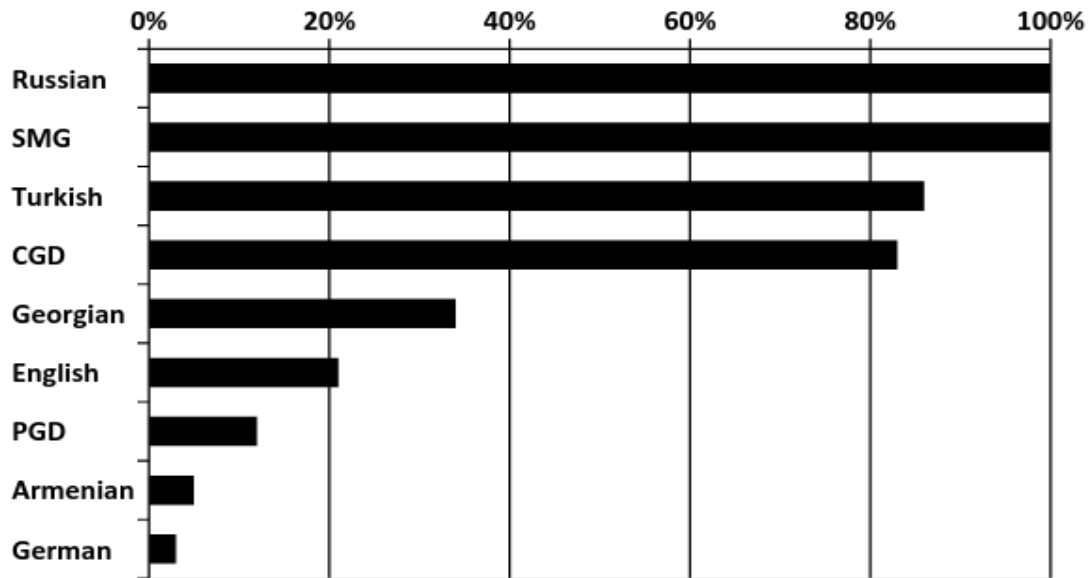


Figure 1. The languages (dialects) Pontic Greek participants reported knowing.

As shown in Figure 1, all the participants reported being speakers of Russian and SMG (100%). Russian, as the language of education, science, administration and everyday communication, often functioned as a lingua franca in the Caucasus area (in both Russia and Georgia) and has therefore secured a strong position in the linguistic repertoire of Pontic Greeks. Similarly, every participant reported knowing SMG, as, along with CGD, it is the dominant and official language used in Cyprus. The Turkish variety that Pontic Greeks reported knowing also boasts high numbers (more than 80%), though it is currently undergoing a rapid decline heading towards its demise due to negative individual attitudes and widespread language ideologies, as will be argued below. In her study investigating language attitudes in immigrant communities, Saville-Troike (1989) points out that the attitudes of immigrant students towards languages and their identity may be a crucial factor in their disposition towards learning a second language. In this respect she observes that, while some students value their own group membership, others reject their own group (and most probably language) and wish to change, while yet others wish to be

members of more than one community of the languages they speak (Saville-Troike 1989: 201). In order to gain a full understanding of the status of SMT among Pontic Greeks and the Cypriot population, it is necessary to look at it from a socio-historical perspective and examine its current socio-political status in Cyprus.

#### *IVa. Socio-historical heritage of SMT*

Regional and international power struggles around the Black Sea since the fifteenth century have led to mass population transfers, including of the Greeks in Pontos, in the north-east of present-day Turkey, from where they were expelled to neighbouring Georgia in the early nineteenth century. The first relocated Pontic Greek villages appeared in the mountainous area of Tsalka (located in the south of present-day Georgia) in 1829. Out of the 43 villages re-built in the Tsalka area, the residents of only four villages (Santa, Charampa, Kioumpet and Tarsoun) were Pontic Greek-speaking (Tsatsanidis 2000: 165-166). The rest spoke Turkish, due to the conditions of previous centuries under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Dorian (1999: 39) points out in this respect that in cases in which people have shifted language and have ‘given up their own entirely, it has nearly always been due to a local history of political suppression, social discrimination, or economic deprivation’.

The island of Cyprus was conquered by the Ottomans in 1571 and remained under their rule until 1878, when it was transferred to the British. In 1960, when Cyprus gained independence from the British, it hosted a mixed population, including a Turkish-speaking minority. In 1974, amidst sectarian strife, Cyprus was partly occupied by the Turkish army, and it remains divided today. On the Greek-Cypriot side of the island, in the Republic of Cyprus, representations of Turks as ‘Hellenism’s barbaric archenemy’ were widely circulated in public and in educational discourses as an effect of the conflict (Papadakis 2008a: 5; 2008b; Zembylas 2010, cited in Charalambous et al. 2016). It is therefore no surprise, that although SMT is one of the official languages of Cyprus (see Karyolemou 2003), it is practically absent from the linguistic and socio-political landscape of Cyprus.

It must be stressed that in the 1990s the tensions between the Turkish-Cypriot and Greek-Cypriot communities intensified and were accompanied by a series of tragic fatal incidents in the Buffer Zone. It was precisely during this period that the major influx of Turkish-speaking Pontic Greeks to the Republic of Cyprus took place. Pontic Greeks, probably being unaware of or showing little interest in (or in some cases, disrespecting) the Turkish problem in Cyprus, used Turkish in their ordinary communication practices both at home and in public, a fact which

frequently triggered negative or very negative sentiments among the local population, the Greek-Cypriots. The first Pontic Greek immigrants had poor command of SMG, and consequently had a very limited spectrum of choice with regard to employment opportunities, frequently resorting to the manual labour market. Their children, however, most of whom attend, or have graduated from, local Greek-Cypriot state schools and who have mastered SMG to a near-native level, now have a wider spectrum of jobs to choose from. A study conducted by Pavlou and Zoumpalidis (2011) showed that some younger Pontic Greeks exhibit a high degree of knowledge in foreign languages such as English, French, Italian and Spanish, among others. Younger Pontic Greeks do not seem to want to follow the work 'path' of their parents, as many of them work in different spheres from those of the older generation. For instance, younger female Pontic Greeks work predominantly in the service economy. As for the younger male representatives of the Pontic Greek community, there are still a number of them who follow the manual-labour careers of their fathers on construction sites, or in low-skilled occupations such as car-cleaners, couriers, drivers and waiters, among others.

Papapavlou and Pavlou (2005) suggest that speaking a particular language triggers beliefs about the members of the corresponding speech community. In this light, taking into account the great sensitivity to the links between language and ethnic and religious identity, local Greek-Cypriots do not seem willing to recognize the 'Greekness' of those Pontic Greeks who speak a language which is highly reminiscent of SMT. This is compounded by the economic class associated with the immigrants, as research in other contexts indicates: Appel and Muysken (1987: 33), for example, report that many Spanish-speaking immigrants in the USA, who fall into the low-income group, associate speaking English with academic achievement and economic progress, whereas Spanish 'gets the stigma of the language of the poor people, and parents who themselves sometimes have a poor command of English try to urge their children to speak English, because they have internalized the societal attitudes towards Spanish'. In this light, it becomes obvious that the attitudes of the majority group can also have an impact on the members of the minority group's attitudes towards their own language.

This idea was clearly manifested in a group interview with three Pontic Greek teenagers from Georgia: Dimitris aged 16, Dina aged 14, and Tasos aged 17, who all attended a local secondary school.

Interview 1.

(the interview was conducted in SMG/CGD)

ΔΖ: Δηλαδή αυτό που θέλεις να πείς είναι ότι μερικοί Κύπριοι δεν αναγνωρίζουν την Ελληνικότητά σου;

Δημ: Ναι..

Ντιν: Μερικοί;! Οι περισσότεροι!

Δημ: Επιδή όταν έγινε ο πόλεμος με την Τουρκία με Πόντο, καί είπαν να αλλάξουν θρησκεία για γλώσσα...οι πιο πολλοί άλλαξαν γλώσσα, καί όταν μιλούν Τούρτζικα, λαλούν: “δε τους Τούρκους!”.

DZ: In other words, what you want to say is that some Cypriots don't recognize your Greekness?

Dim: Yes.

Din (*intervenues*): Some?! The majority!

Dim: Because when there was a war between Turkey and Pontos...and they told us to change either our religion or language...the majority changed language (to Turkish, DZ), and when Pontic Greeks talk in Turkish, they (Greek-Cypriots, DZ) say: ‘look at the Turks!’

(from Zoumpalidis 2008)

It becomes clear from the above interview excerpt that Greek-Cypriots, being sensitive to the link between language and ethnicity, are sceptical about the Pontic Greeks' allegiance to Greek culture and to Greek civilization in general. Under such circumstances, having familiarized themselves with a high degree of sensitivity to the political situation of the Turks in Cyprus, Pontic Greeks have become more linguistically aware, leading them to suppress their Turkish linguistic identity (see Figure 2, below). In other words, the great possibility of social and economic disadvantage flowing from speaking Turkish in public became clear to them. 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’. Clearly, Turkish is seen as a highly stigmatized language that in Cyprus has a strongly negative indexical value.



#### *IVb. Internal factors of language shifts*

The internal factors that are leading to the demise of Turkish seem to stem from external factors: Pontic Greeks seem to have internalized out-group attitudes to SMT, a fact which has caused them to start distancing themselves from using the Turkish variety they speak, as its perceived ‘toxic’ effect appears to be affecting their ontological essence as ‘authentic Greeks’. This is particularly reflected in the participants’ reported language use patterns (see Figure 2).

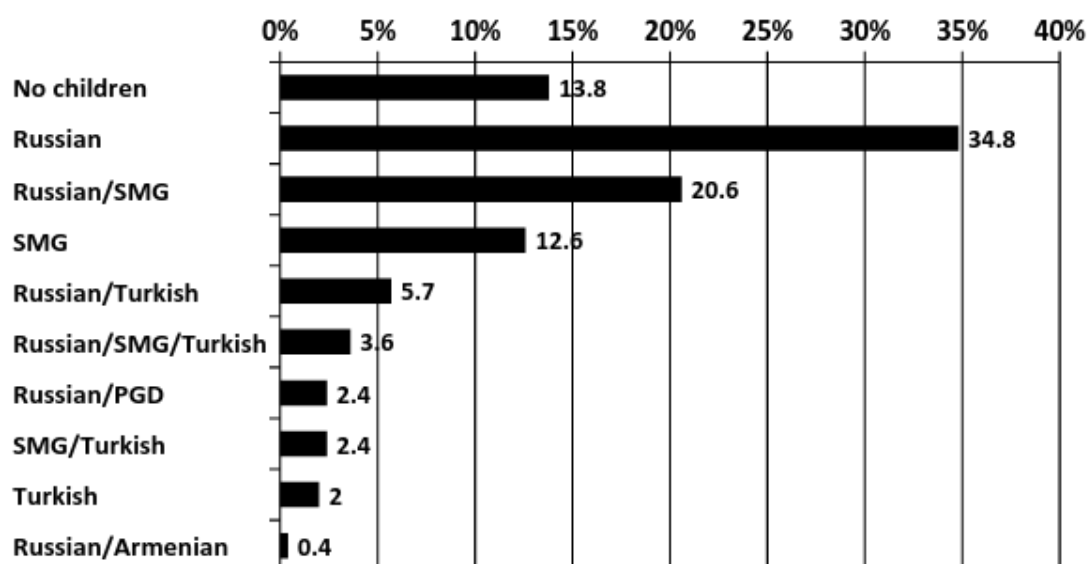


Figure 2.<sup>2</sup> Language varieties Pontic Greek parents reported using in addressing their children.

As shown in Figure 2, only 2% (n=5) of Pontic Greek parents reported using only Turkish when they address their children. Out of this number, three participants belong to the older age group (51+), one participant belongs to the third age group (36-50) and one to the second (26-35). It appears that, for these parents, Turkish functions as the dominant language within the family domain. Slightly higher in number were those parents who reported using Turkish along with other languages when they address their children: SMG and Turkish (2.4%); Russian, SMG and Turkish (3.6%); Russian and Turkish (5.7%). As in the former case, it is predominantly older Pontic Greek parents who reported using Turkish in combination with Russian and/or SMG when they address their children (some of whom are probably adults themselves). A Pontic Greek father of two primary school-age children mentioned in an informal conversation that,

<sup>2</sup> This question is, of course, not applicable to those participants who reported not having any children.

although they have access to a few Turkish TV channels (living in proximity to the Turkish-Cypriot border in Nicosia), he forbids all members of the family, except for his father, who does not speak any language other than Turkish well, from watching TV in Turkish. The relatively insignificant number of Pontic Greeks who use Turkish with their children, in the context of 80% reporting knowledge of Turkish, implies that these speakers are exceptionally immune to the ideological stigmatization of Turkish in their new home, probably due to their adherence to the habit of speaking this language with their children in their country of origin. The vast majority, however, are reluctant to use Turkish with their children, which is indicative of the fact that they are highly concerned about transmitting what is a stigmatized language to the younger generation, and they make every effort to shield their children from any exposure to it. Consider, in this light, Interview 2, where Vlad, aged 34, who knows Turkish, claims to refuse to address his only daughter in this language.

#### Interview 2.

(the interview was conducted in Russian)

ДЗ: У тебя есть дети?

В: Есть, дочка.

ДЗ: На каком языке ты с ней разговариваешь?

В: Русский.

ДЗ: Только русский?

В: Да!

ДЗ: А турецкий, греческий?

В: Нет! Вообще турецкий нет!

ДЗ: Почему?

В: На греческом так немного, а на турецком нет.

ДЗ: Почему?

В: Я не хочу на турецком говорить.

ДЗ: Почему?

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B: Зачем? Зачем ей это?

DZ: То есть ты не хочешь чтоб она вообще..

B: (вмешивается) Нет! У нас считается русский культурный язык, это надо по-русски разговаривать.

DZ: А турецкий это некультурный язык?

B: Он некультурный считается.

DZ: Do you have children?

V: Yes, I've got a daughter.

DZ: What language do you speak to her?

V: Russian.

DZ: Only Russian?

V: Yes!

DZ: What about Turkish, Greek (SMG, DZ)?

V: No! I never use Turkish!

DZ: Why?

V: I may use a little Greek (SMG, DZ), but Turkish no.

DZ: Why?

V: I don't want to speak Turkish.

DZ: Why?

V: What for? What does she need it for?

DZ: That means you don't want her to ever...

V: (intervenes) No! Russian is considered to be a cultural language, we should speak Russian.

DZ: And Turkish isn't a cultural language?

V: It is not considered to be a cultural language.

As can be seen from Interview 2, Vlad questions the need to speak (and consequently to teach) Turkish to his daughter, as this language does not seem to have any instrumental value to him in Cyprus. It should be noted that the Turkish language survives only in the spoken, not written form within the Pontic Greek community, a fact which itself seems to signal lack of prestige. In this respect, Hudson (1996: 21) maintains that for most people a variety which is not used in formal writing is not prestigious. Interestingly, Vlad considers Turkish not to be a cultural language. This negative attitude to Turkish could be extended to imply that those who speak Turkish are culturally 'void' people in his opinion, uneducated or people without good manners. Since Vlad is greatly concerned that his daughter should grow up culturally educated, he consciously chooses not to use Turkish with his daughter and uses Russian instead, which, he claims, is a cultural language, suggesting it possesses great prestige. It should be stressed, however, that not all participants share this strongly negative view of Turkish: a view which might be educationally self-defeating: Siegel (1999) suggests that the use of stigmatized native language varieties in instrumental, accommodation and awareness programmes has a positive effect on the acquisition of the majority language and literacy, as well as on students' participation, self-esteem and overall academic achievement.

Thus, over the last decade, Pontic Greeks have restricted the use of Turkish to a considerable degree mainly so as to not trigger negative emotions or attitudes among the local population, fuelled by a concern not to associate 'speaking Turkish' with 'being Turkish'. In this respect, Hoffman (1991: 229) points out that language is frequently seen as a symbol of national identity. Under these circumstances, Pontic Greeks are trying to use more SMG in their attempt to reconstruct their linguistic identity and exhibit their ethnic allegiance to Greek culture through linguistic behaviour not only with the out-group majority but also within their own community.

Based on my observations of different in-group celebrations or parties, it appears that the vast majority of Pontic Greeks openly and proudly use SMG when proposing a toast.<sup>3</sup> Instances of Turkish language use were also observed, mainly by older, Turkish-speaking members of the community, who apparently resorted to Turkish due to their poor Russian and SMG language skills. In most cases, every utterance in Turkish was followed by a translation into SMG or Russian. In addition, during the celebration, it was predominantly Greek or Pontic Greek live

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<sup>3</sup> It is frequently the case that, when demonstratively using SMG, some middle-aged and older Pontic Greeks make occasional grammatical, vocabulary, stylistic or phonological mistakes by native Greek-Cypriot standards, which is not unexpected, as it is a second, even third language for them. Nonetheless, these speakers do not seem to be afraid or ashamed of their imperfect SMG skills, thus demonstrating their desire to adhere to the Greek community that this speech indexes.

music and songs that were played and sung, accompanied by Greek or Pontic Greek traditional dances, in contrast to the predominantly Turkish music and songs, accompanied by the Turkish traditional dances, which predominated at most celebrations and parties of Pontic Greeks in Cyprus from the mid- or late 1990s to the beginning of 2000. By speaking SMG, Pontic Greeks claim rights to linguistic and ethnic identity as authentic Greeks and a right to belong to the broader Greek culture and Greek civilization in general. It is therefore not surprising that slightly fewer than 50% of participants ethnically self-identified as ‘Greeks’, while others used various other labels that connote Greek-related ethnonyms, such as ‘Pontian’, ‘Russian Pontian’ and ‘Greek from Russia’, among others. What is noteworthy here is the fact that no one associated themselves with any Turkish-related ethnic labels, despite more than 80% of the community members claiming to know Turkish (see Figure 1).

#### *IVc. The role of the ‘mother tongue’ and its influence*

The concept of the ‘mother tongue’ also comes into play in the case, especially when it concerns participants’ symbolic manifestations of their common Greek roots on the one hand and their distance from Turkish on the other. In the present study, the term ‘mother tongue’ is used to denote the language one feels to be one’s ‘mother tongue’, irrespective of whether this language is one’s dominant language (i.e. the language one speaks best) or the one acquired as L1, or not (see Figures 3 and 4).

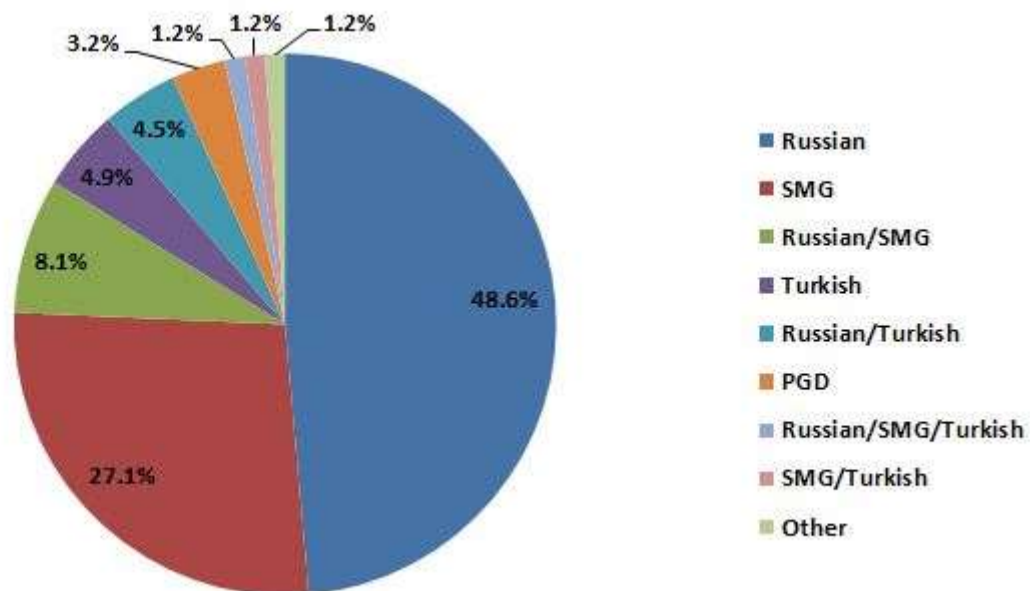


Figure 3. Languages reported as ‘mother tongue(s)’ (figures in %).

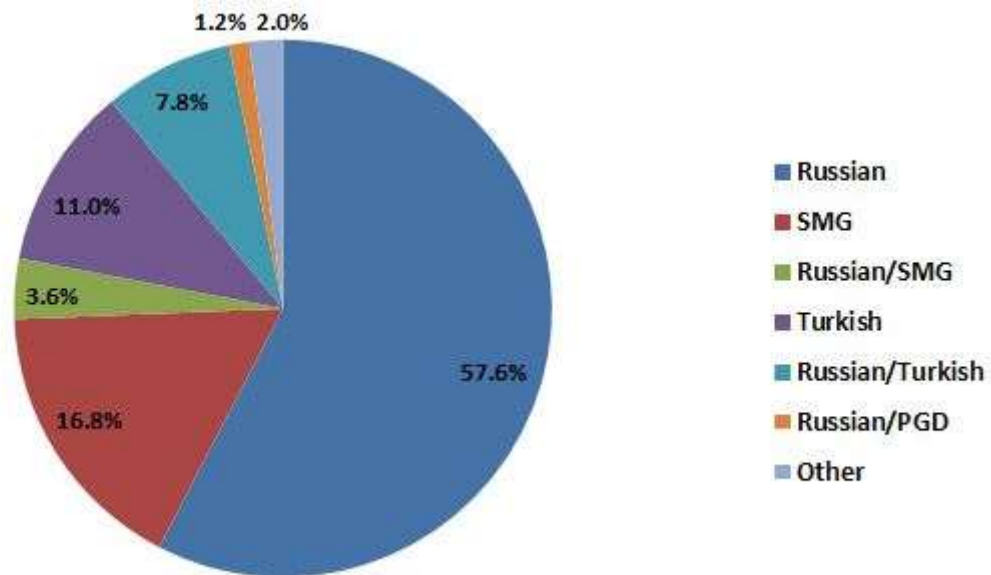


Figure 4. Reported dominant language(s) of participants (figures in %).

As the evidence in Figure 3 illustrates, almost half of the participants identified Russian as their ‘mother tongue’, whereas nearly 58% of them reported having Russian as their dominant language. However, remarkable differences are observed in relation to SMG and Turkish. Slightly more than a quarter (27.1%) of the participants identified SMG as their ‘mother tongue’, even though only every 6<sup>th</sup> participant reported being proficient in it (16.8%, Figure 4). More specifically, by reporting SMG as their mother tongue (which, however, does not necessarily mean that those participants are highly proficient in it), Pontic Greeks seem to wish to be associated with the Greek culture, language, and identity (see also discussion above). The situation with Turkish is the opposite: fewer participants identified Turkish as their ‘mother tongue’ (nearly 5%, Figure 3), and more participants reported having it as their dominant language (11%, Figure 4). In this particular context, the term ‘mother tongue’ seems to be loaded with a very intimate meaning, as it is the language that indexes a linguistic heritage inextricably linked to one’s own kin. Seen in this way, as part of a language ideology of belonging to a nation conceived of as extended kin, it becomes clear why the number of respondents identifying Turkish as their ‘mother tongue’ is smaller than those reporting it to be dominant. As Blommaert (2006) argues, the indexical dimensions a language possesses anchor it firmly in larger socio-political processes. Thus claiming Turkish to be one’s ‘mother tongue’ in Cyprus incurs a high risk of being associated not only with being (or being related to) a Turk, but also with Islam (though Pontic Greeks identify on the whole as Orthodox Christian). Following this logic, it

becomes obvious that one's 'mother tongue' plays a significant role in the community of Pontic Greeks, which can unambiguously highlight or diminish one's cultural, linguistic and/or ethnic belonging. Participants therefore appear to be aware of the historical and social nature of language, as they have internalized language attitudes and the consequences of the linguistic and socio-political 'burden' that is associated with speaking Turkish in Cyprus.

## **V. Conclusion**

The present paper has sought to shed light on the internal and external factors that have led the Pontic Greek community in Cyprus to shift collectively away from Turkish and towards Greek. It was argued that the negative language attitudes and dominant language ideologies of Greek-Cypriots regarding the stigmatized Standard Modern Turkish and consequently the Turkish variety that Pontic Greeks speak has led them to question the very Greek nature of the Turkish-speaking Pontic Greeks. However, the major driving force towards a language shift is the desire of Pontic Greeks to see their community as authentically *Greek* (and to be recognized as such by the out-group majority), rather than being excluded from the 'Greek world'. It was also argued that Pontic Greeks are trying to 'reload' their community by reconsidering the role of the Turkish language; active attempts are made to distance themselves from their community's previous linguistic and cultural circumstances, which were interwoven with the Turkish language and Turkish cultural elements. As a result, the community seems to be indexing its ontological linguistic, cultural and ethnic Greekness, having been sensitised to the Greek-Turkish question after moving to the Republic of Cyprus, whereas this had not been a problem when they had lived in the former Soviet Union.

Turkish, being associated with a low-income group and seen as a negative index in ethnic group identification, appears to be left with little chance of survival in the community of Pontic Greeks in Cyprus, despite the fact that some members of the community still use it in their everyday communication. Generally, it was argued that language can function as a salient index of one's linguistic, cultural and ethnic belonging. More specifically, it is for this reason that Pontic Greeks, in claiming allegiance to Orthodox Christianity and entertaining great pride in being Greeks, vehemently reject using Turkish not only in public, but also within the domestic environment and at parties and (national) celebrations. Lastly, it appears that Pontic Greeks are parting fairly easily with Turkish, previously a dominant language within the community, and

without any regret, thus positioning it as ‘foreign’ to their community and implicated in centuries of life under the Ottoman Empire.

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