Article
Language Contact and Borders among Pontic Greek and Cypriot Greek in Karpasia, Cyprus: Yours Don’t Match with Ours

Elena Ioannidou

Department of Educational Sciences, University of Cyprus, 1678 Nicosia, Cyprus; ioannidou.elena@ucy.ac.cy

Abstract: The current paper explores language contact between two Greek varieties, Pontic Greek and Cypriot Greek, in the northern part of Cyprus. After the de facto partition of Cyprus in 1974, several Pontic Greek-speaking communities were transplanted from their homeland in Trabzon to the peninsula of Karpasia in northern Cyprus. These “newcomers” or “immigrants” or “settlers” were brought from Turkey after the displacement of the Greek Cypriot population living in the north. Hence, from 1976 another Greek linguistic variety emerged in the area, Pontic Greek or Romeyka or Rumca, which was the home variety of the newcomers. Although Greek Cypriots were forced to leave the area, Cypriot Greek retained a strong presence in Karpasia, spoken by Turkish Cypriot Romeika speakers and by Greek Cypriots who remained “enclaved” in some villages of the peninsula. Hence, a dynamic and multifacet sociolinguistic context has been created where two main non-standard varieties of the Greek language, Cypriot Greek and Pontic Greek, are in contact and are spoken by different groups of speakers and where Turkish remains the dominant and official language. Within this context, the current paper explores instances of language contact between Pontic Greek and Cypriot Greek, focusing on the narratives produced by Pontic Greek speakers. The paper employs ethnographic methods for approaching these communities and for understanding issues of language use and language values within a heavily politicized context. The theoretical constructs of space and border are used to interpret the data and provide a deeper understanding of language contact, daily practices, and wider ideologies.

Keywords: Pontic Greek; Cypriot Greek; language contact; space; border

1. Introduction

In the aftermath of the de facto partition of Cyprus in 1974, several Pontic Greek-speaking communities were transplanted from their homeland in the district of Trabzon, Turkey to the peninsula of Karpasia in Cyprus. The linguistic ecology of the northern part of Cyprus has, ever since 1974, been undergoing several changes since the vast majority of the Greek Cypriot population has been displaced. Although the Turkish language has been the formal and dominant language in the area, the Greek language retained a strong presence, with Cypriot Greek spoken by Turkish Cypriot Romeika speakers (Ioannidou et al. 2019) and by Greek Cypriots who remained in some villages of Karpasia. On top of that, from 1976, another Greek linguistic variety emerged, Pontic Greek or Rumca or Romeyka (Sitaridou 2013) brought by some of the Turkish nationals who were transplanted from Trabzon to various villages of the Karpasia peninsula. Hence, a dynamic and multifacet sociolinguistic context has been created where two main non-standard varieties of the Greek language, Cypriot Greek and Pontic Greek, are in contact and are spoken by different groups of speakers.

Within this context, the current paper, elaborating on the contact between Pontic Greek and Cypriot Greek aims to investigate the expanding/shifting linguistic repertoires of Pontic Greek speakers in Karpasia, focusing on the interactions of Pontic Greek with Cypriot Greek. These communities find themselves in the midst of larger socio-political forces, influencing their language choice, language shift and their formed repertoires. The
newly formed space and the shifting boundaries create contexts of crossing, renegotiation and dialogue. The current paper presents instances of language contact between the two varieties and investigates the way this contact reflects wider negotiations and tensions in relation to space, community and belonging.

2. Theoretical Preamble

2.1. Variation as Indexical and Meaning-Maker

One important aspect when studying cases of language contact, especially in contexts of borders and borderlands is to move away from maps that only display and do not explain (Britain 2013) and explore what speakers do with languages (Urciuoli 1995). When we study variation and cases of contact it is important to explore the situated and day-to-day use of different varieties. As Eckert (2009) asserts variation is connected to meaning making, it is fluid and in a constant process of change.

Eckert (2009) argues that we cannot ignore what people do with various chain shifts in language to construct meaning (p. 454), and that the meanings of variables are not precise but rather constitute a field of potential meanings, an indexical field or constellation of ideologically related meanings (p. 454). Speakers use variables not simply to reflect or reassert their particular pre-ordained place on the social map but to make ideological moves (p. 464). This is what Eckert (2009) describes as the use of variables as indexical claims. Studying variation as an indexical system means taking meaning as a point of departure rather than the sound changes or structural issues. Similarly, Urciuoli (1995) in his work on language and borders argues that linguistic elements are semiotically complex, indexically grounded in human relations, and frequently iconic. In the case of Pontic Greek speakers in Cyprus, the way they move into Cypriot Greek and the perceptions they hold for this use becomes central for understanding the daily use of varieties into contact situation and the indexical value these varieties are assigned.

In addition, studying varieties into contact from this perspective questions the traditional view of a variable as having a fixed meaning regardless of its context of use, based on a “static, non-dialectical view of language” (Eckert 2009, p. 464). According to the classic study of Weinreich et al. (1968, in Eckert 2009) the social structuring of variability provides orderly heterogeneity in the constant process of change. This has been also described in the process of enregisterment (Agha 2003, 2005) and the notion of speech event chain. According to Agha (2003) variables are disseminated by discourses that circulate through the activities of persons linked to each other in particular genres of communicative activity (pp. 244–45); these constructs move through society with speech events and the interlinkage of such events over historical time comprises a higher order structure (p. 245).

With this approach, Agha (2005) indicates this continual process of production and reproduction in language use and registers and the notion of enregistered voices. It also provides a framework from understanding the link between micro day-to-day use and its connection to identities and to larger social entities. As Eckert (2009) asserts, “different ways of saying things are intended to signal different ways of being” (p. 456); and ultimately there is a link between the shift from the individual to larger social categories, where the linguistic sign is systematically connected to the political economy and to the demographic categories that both emerge and constrain local practice (Bourdieu 1977):

it is in the links between the individual and the macrosociological category that we must seek the social practices in which people fashion their ways of speaking, moving their styles this way or that as they move their personae through situations from moment to moment, from day to day and through the life course.

(Eckert 2009, p. 463)
2.2. Variation in Connection to Space and Borders

When it comes to communities living in borderlands and using multiple varieties, the concept of space becomes crucial. The influence of space on language use and formed repertoires has begun gaining attention by the work of human geographers who pointed out that space was overlooked in relation to time, and it was often seen as something neutral and static (Britain 2013). Soja (1989) calls this trend as historicism, where the social is being and interpreted in relation to time and where the spatiality of social life is usually overlooked (pp. 10–11).

However, spatiality is very important, especially in cases of contact. Britain (2013) notes that we must find a place for space if we are to fully understand the geographical differentiation of language (p. 633). Spatiality is not fixed and is always in a state of becoming, an ongoing process (Britain 2013). The way people adjust to new places and the role language attains in this process is very important. Britain (2013) outlines the importance of routines, what he calls routinization, in the construction of spatiality and in the creation of communities of practice. In cases of change in space and place, as in migration, gentrification or, as in transplanted communities such as the Pontic Greek speakers in Cyprus, breaks are caused in socialized routines and in social networks. According to Johnson (1990, in Britain 2013) “when routines are broken, as they are in the situations which lead to dialect contact, people seek to reroutinize their lives to some degree, as a natural development of their need for ontological security” (127). Britain (2013) notes that the consequences of reroutinization are usually the development of stronger social network ties and in some cases the enforcement of a more focused koineized linguistic system. Britain (2013) asserts that, as the place evolves, “routines are formed and broken and reformed, ( . . . ) routines create, break down, and recreate new spatialities”. (p. 616). In this way space is socially produced and we have reformation of geographical landscapes.

Political borders reinforce the complexity of language and spatiality. People living on the borderland are often faced with dominant discourses circulated that “they are one people with those in the centre and not with those neighbors just across the border” (Joseph 2008, p. 105). However, these centred-based approaches treat borders as something completed and static and they erase the agency of the borderland inhabitants in constructing their localized sense of what the border means (Sturgeon 2005, in Mitsch 2016). As Mitsch (2016) argues, communities living within the borderland often find ways to ignore or challenge the territorial sanctions placed on them, and people find creative ways to inhabit and transform space to their needs.

Borders then become sites of both division and contact with implications for language use. Linguistic and geographical borders do not always coincide and often the linguistic divergence results from the way people construe their social belonging across territories (Britain 2013). Similarly, Urciuoli (1995) points out that although this straightforward connection of language and borders lies in “the shared ‘imagining’ of spatially bounded linguistically homogenous nations” (p. 527), still much of what the border represents is in effect deterritorialized (p. 533) because of people’s mobility. Studying therefore linguistic features and language values allow us to see how they contribute to the on-going social construction or erasure of the border (Mitsch 2016).

3. The Transplanted Pontic Greek Community and Its Linguistic Variety

3.1. The Community

The presence of Pontic Greek speakers in Cyprus, who are Turkish nationals, has been unknown to the scientific community and for this reason there are limited references or data from which characteristics of the community can be described. The political context surrounding this community is very tense. In the midst of the unresolved political conflict, the issue of Turkish settlers brought from Turkey on the promise of free housing and agricultural land, remains a burning political issue on the island. The Greek Cypriot community regards the process of settlement as illegal and against the UN resolutions and therefore this community as not having the right to be in this place. According to Psaltis
and Cakal (2016), these “settlers/immigrants” are seen as a threat to the demographic nature of Cyprus and are considered as one of the by-products of Turkish war crimes committed by Turkey against Cyprus (p. 233). On top of that, a cleavage has been created between the local Turkish Cypriots and the settlers, mostly based on differences in culture, religion, education (Akçali 2007). This is reflected in a report prepared for the Council of Europe by Jaakso Laakso in 2003:

The settlers come mainly from the region of Anatolia, one of the less developed regions in Turkey. Their customs and traditions differ in a significant way from those in Cyprus. These differences are the main reason for the tensions and dissatisfaction of the indigenous Turkish-Cypriot population who tend to view them as a foreign element.

(Laakso 2003 in Akçali 2007, p. 73)

Although Akçali (2007) points out that this divergence is now shifting in new generations with the intermarriages between what he calls as natives and settlers, still there seems to be a divide between the two, with Turkish nationals keeping bonds with their villages in Turkey and retaining themselves feelings of being treated as second class citizens in Cyprus (p. 75). Similarly, Psaltis and Cakal (2016) argue that the intergroup relations between the Turkish settlers/immigrants and Turkish Cypriots is problematic and complex at its best. The Turkish nationals are often seen as a threat by both the Greek and the Turkish Cypriots and an obstacle for the process of reconciliation and reunification of the island.

In terms of demographics, the total number of settlers is estimated at 100,000–110,000 (Akçali 2007). The Report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography of the European Parliamentary Committee (Laakso 2003) underlines a population growth of the Turkish Cypriot community for the period 1975–1977 to an estimated increase of 30,000 (average 10% annual growth). According to the report, this growth has been extraordinary and it was due to the populations that were brought from different parts of Turkey to settle in the northern part of Cyprus. In this report, Trabzon is listed as one of the places of origin of “settlers”. Additionally, the study conducted in PRIO makes direct references to the settlement of Turkish nationals from Turkey in Cyprus during the period 1976–1977, giving detailed information about the transfer of an entire village (Uzuntarla/Alithinos) from the Çaykara district of the northeast Black Sea to one of the villages of Karpasia.

In the current research, three villages in the area of Karpasia were located in which Pontic Greek speakers reside. The numbers are revealing since they point forward to a significant group being transplanted from the area of Trabzon to Cyprus. Evidently, the majority of the Pontic Greek-speaking communities in Cyprus are from Çaykara and Sürmene (Figure 1a). Speakers from Çaykara are settled in East Karpasia, whereas speakers from Sürmene are settled in West Karpasia (Figure 1b). The main wave of settlement occurred in 1976 and there are estimations (based on oral interviews of speakers) that around 20,000 Turkish nationals-Pontic Greek speakers were relocated in Cyprus (although numbers might have been exaggerated and need to be confirmed). Based on the interview data collected during this project, around 200 hundred families arrived in Cyprus from the village Alithinos (Çaykara district) and were located in one of the villages of Karpasia.
3.2. The Linguistic Variety: Pontic Greek or Romeyka or Rumca

Pontic Greek has had a strong presence in the area of Trabzon/Trabezunda (e.g., Dawkins 1937; Mackridge 1987; Sitaridou 2013; Bortone 2009; Özkân 2013), since antiquity. In 1923 there was a linguistic schism in Pontic Greek, since with the treaty of Lausanne, Christian Pontic Greek speakers were forced to leave the area of Pontus, while Muslim Pontic Greek speakers remained in the area. Presently, there is a number of villages mostly in the eastern corner of Pontus, in the area of Trabzon, especially near Of where “the locals speak varieties of a dialect that is in fact Greek – akin to the Pontic Greek dialects once spoken there by Greeks” (Bortone 2009, p. 67). The villages who were transplanted to Cyprus, in the area of Karşısia, belong to these enclaves referred in the literature.

Dawkins (1937) described Pontic as, “developed from the ancient language into something so different from common modern Greek as almost to deserve the name of another language” (p. 25). In addition, he described an internal language variation within Muslim Pontic Greek, noting that “in Pontos each village had its own local forms of speech” (p. 35). Similarly, Mackridge (1987) mentions that there are indeed considerable variations from one region to another and that Pontic would not have been a homogeneous dialect. Another important point made by Mackridge (1987) regarding Muslim Pontic Greek is that unlike the Pontic-speakers in Greece, whose language was influenced by the non-Pontic environment with the effects of the school and the church, the Ophitic Pontic-speakers preserved “most of the local dialect intact and uncontaminated by interference from education, the Church, and Greek national language policy” (p. 118). As he indicates, Muslim Pontic-Greek has been influenced by Turkish due to the extensive language contact but it has retained its core features intact because of its isolation from mainland Greek.

Similarly, in a more recent study Bortone (2009) points out that Muslim Pontic Greek has not been touched by “the strict policies of language standardization, archaization and purism” (p. 69). He also sketches Muslim Pontic Greek as a low status, non-written and therefore as a language “in its natural state” (p. 69). Finally, because of its status, he points
out that all speakers of Muslim Pontic Greek are now bilingual, most of them being more fluent in Turkish than in their home variety.

In the current research on the Turkish nationals, the linguistic/language aspect is not mentioned and there are no studies documenting the linguistic varieties they brought with them during their arrival in Cyprus. In the various reports it is mentioned that some of the Turkish nationals brought from Anatolia are Pontic Greek speakers, and there are also references to Kurdish speakers, however there are no direct references to the issue of language. From the initial fieldwork conducted by the researchers in Karpasia, it emerged that the transplanted community under study has a strong multilingual profile with significant differences among its speakers depending on age, education, gender and social network. Regardless of individual differences, the majority of the members of the community have Turkish and Pontic Greek in their linguistic repertoire, Turkish being the national language and Pontic Greek being the home language, with varied levels of competence depending on the speakers. It has to be noted here that the term “Pontic Greek” was not a term used by the members of the community; on the contrary different names and phrases were used to describe their home language (see Section 5.1).

4. Methodology and Data Analysis

The study employed ethnographic methods for reaching the Pontic Greek speakers in remote villages in the Karpasia area. In the current study ethnography is not mere methodology, rather the whole approach for the research takes on ethnography as a data driven social theory (Woolard 1985). In other words, the way the community was approached, the methods employed for data collection and the way the data was analyzed were all influenced by an ethnographic understanding of linguistic communities nested in their natural settings and the researchers as both observers and reflexive participants during the research process. The fieldwork process lasted three months and the main data collection methods entailed oral interviews, including video and audio recordings of selected speakers from three different villages in Karpasia, and detailed fieldnotes from participant observations in the villages. In particular, 23 participants were interviewed, 7 from west Karpasia originally from Çaykara, Turkey and 16 from east Karpasia originally from Sürmene. Most of the participants were located in the village coffee shops, while with others we conducted the interviews in their homes. The majority of the participants (18 out of the 23) had an age range 45–60, two were above 80 and three were in their 30s. In terms of gender, there were 16 men and 7 women. The interviews were conducted either individually or in focus groups, depending on the setting. Due to the multilingualism of the participants, we conducted the interviews in a multilingual manner, using both Pontic Greek, Turkish and Cypriot Greek. For this reason, in the research team conducting the interviews there were researchers competent in all the languages spoken by the participants.

From the data analysis and the narratives of the participants, four different themes emerged in relation to language contact:

1. **the variety with no name**, i.e., the tensions arising from the different names assigned to the linguistic variety either by members of the community or by others.
2. **from Pontic Greek to Cypriot Greek**, i.e., the way Pontic Greek (Rumca) functioned as a bridge for learning Cypriot Greek (Romeika).
3. **meta and cross-linguistic awareness**, i.e., the awareness the members of the community exhibited regarding the structural and functional differences between the two varieties.
4. **tensions in language contact**, i.e., issues of (un) intelligibility reflecting wider cultural and political tensions in space and identity.

All the above document the ways in which language contact in politically sensitive areas can be an indexical of the role different varieties can play in performed identities.
5. Instances and Narratives of Language Contact

5.1. The Variety with the Many Names

Issues of access and of trust were very important when we started collecting data in these communities since we were coming from “the other side”. What made things even more complex was when we realised, during the first interviews, that often we would use the “wrong term” to refer to their linguistic variety. In the literature, the Pontic Greek spoken in the Black Sea has been described with different terms and names. One of the most used terms in Turkish language, is Rumca (Özkan 2013), a more generic term that has been used from the 19th century to indicate the Greek spoken by populations within the Ottoman empire (e.g., Greek variety spoken in Istanbul, Greek variety spoken by Muslim Cretans, Cypriot Greek, in Özkan 2013) and to distinguish it from the Greek spoken in mainland Greece, i.e., Yunanca. In addition, the term Romeika has been used in colloquial Greek up to the 20th century to refer to vernacular Modern Greek in Asia Minor (Sitaridou 2013) but also as a broader term to refer to Modern Greek by Modern Greek speakers. Sitaridou (2013) introduced the term Romeyka with a different spelling to refer to the Greek-speaking enclaves in Pontus today. The term Romeika or Romea is also used by Greek-speaking Turkish Cypriots to refer to their Greek variety at the northern part of Cyprus (Ioannidou et al. 2019, 2020). Finally, the term Pondiaka or Pontic Greek is widely used especially among Greek dialectologists to describe the typology and the structural characteristics of these varieties.

During our encounters with members of the community, we employed the terms “Romeika” or “Pondiaka” to inquire about their linguistic variety. Occasionally, we would use the term “Ellinika” (Greek) to distinguish from Turkish. However, these terms created either tensions or confusion, as it is indicated in extracts 1 and 2 below.

Extract 1—Neyla

i ‘mana mu e’milan tin γylosan tis tj’istera e’milan ‘turtfika (.) ’omos para’pano t’itan i ‘γylosa na ‘pumen mesto ‘spitin ( . . . ) a’la ‘itan i ‘γylosa tis t’itan ‘otis (.) e’sis la’lite to bondia’ka e’mis la’lumen to ‘laza (.) ‘ama ‘e’fi pu to la’lun tfe ‘alospos ‘γylosan.

[my mother spoke her language (first) and then she spoke Turkish (.) but mostly it was (her) language in the house (.) but it was her language it was what (.) you call it Pontiaka but we call it Lazzia (.) but there are others who just call it a different language].

Extract 2—Yasin

N: a’tos o ens stin al’maja ro’meika kunu’jefcete↑
[the one in Germany (does) he speak Romeika?]

Y: kunu’jefcete (.) ksėr (.) ro’meika cipria’ko ’leksi (.) ’rumdʒa e’ksėr mi.

[he speaks (.) he knows (.) Romeika (is) a Cypriot word (.) he knows Rumca].

In both the extracts above Neyla and Yasin reveal a dichotomy between the way the others name their language and their own point of view. Neyla asserts that “you call it Pondiaka (Pontic) but we call it Lazzia”, implying that they have their own terminology which is different from the names the others give and indicating that she is not satisfied with the name the others use. Neyla uses the term “Lazzia”, a term found in the bibliography (see Drettas 1997) and also used by the local populations in the area of Karpasia to refer to people from Trabzon (“Laži”, fieldnotes). In the same manner, Yasin objects to the use of the term “Romeika” by our researcher (extract 2), and he uses the term “Rumca” instead. It has to be stressed here that often the use of the term Romeika was referring to the Cypriot Greek spoken by the local Turkish Cypriots, so the members of the community preferred the term “Rumca” to make the distinction. This is also evident in extracts 3 below, where Mustafa talks about his friend’s father being fluent both in Romeika (Cypriot Greek) and Lazđja (Pontic Greek).
Extract 3—Mustafa

na 'pate ston 'tʃirin du far'ʃin ro'meika far'ʃin 'lazdʒa e'kseri (.) po 'uːla e'kseri.
[you should go to his father (he speaks) fluent Romeika fluent Lasdza (.) he knows everything].

Finally, Ali also provided a definition linking the different terms between them, regarding the origin of the language (extract 4):

Extract 4—Ali

'lazdʒa en 'rumdʒika (.) ta pa'xa ta 'pondika.
[lazdza is Rumtzika (.) old Pontic].

It was evident that many of the participants did not use specific names for their home linguistic variety but rather they would use the general phrase “our language”, “our own”, something that is common in enclave or marginalized languages. This is encapsulated in extract 5 below:

Extract 5—Huriye and Neyla

Huriye in her early 20s is Neyla’s daughter (40+). We are all in the kitchen, Huriye is making dolma with her sister and Neyla is at the sitting room with her husband and other researchers. Huriye speaks to me and to N. (the other researcher who speaks Pontic Greek)
H: eh ro'meika tʃe'turtʃika (.) e'livon an'dama (.) e'livon an'dama.( . . . ) 'ama t e'meteron e'si vri'kas t e'meteron (.) do 'iiton i 'mana mu la'umastin ep e'tʃino.
[em Romeika and Turkish (.) a bit of both, a bit of both ( . . . ) but our language (.) you understand our language (.) it was my mother who speaks this].

Neyla listens and she comments on her daughter’s linguistic competence.
N: neka'ton:
the child still mixes it]
E: pu 'itan mi'tʃːa i 'kori su e'si traʃu'duses sta ro'meika i traʃu'duses tis is ta/
[when your daughter was young did you sing to her in Romeika or in/]
N: sti 'vlošan mu (.) sti 'vlošan mu nše (.) ta ro'meika dën 'kseri tra'ʃuʃa (.) a'koma e'ʃo 'lia'ksero (.) sti 'vlošan mu nše.
[in my language (.) in my language (.) in Romeika she doesn’t know any songs (.) even I don’t know many (.) in my language yes].

Overall, it was evident, that as in the case of many non-standardized and enclave varieties, the speakers of this community had not one common name for their own variety; instead, they provided different names that were often conflicting and reflected wider ideological positioning. So, they would often use the terms Rumca/Rumtzika or Lazdza/Lazika, to a lesser degree the term Romeika/Romeka, only scarcely the term Pondika, and never the term Ellinika. These findings confirm Bortone’s (2009) point about Pontic Greek speakers in Trabzon:

many in their speech community do not even know that the language they speak has anything to do with Greek. Some do not know which parts of what they say are Turkish and which are their local ‘other language’. Many call that language lazika ( . . . ) confusing it with Laz ( . . . ) many call it Pondiaka ( . . . ) and never Ellinika”.

(p. 69)

5.2. From Pontic Greek to Cypriot Greek: Developing Multilingual Repertoires

The vast majority of our participants were competent in Pontic Greek and Turkish. Pontic Greek had a strong presence in the communities we visited. As Malek (extract 6) pointed out about his village:
Extract 6—Malek, West Karpasia

'uli (.) 'opja 'porta 'ḍelis xti’pisumen mi’lumen (.) sindi’jen:umen.

[all of us (.) any door we knock (.) we speak (.) we speak].

Similarly, Ahmet mentioned that Rumca was the main language at his house and that
he started learning Turkish only upon their arrival in Cyprus:

Extract 7—Ahmet

'ul:ɔn 'rumdʒa ( . . . ) me ti ‘manan mu ton ‘ʧirin mu (.) ton pa’pu mu (.) 'ama pu
’ertamen Ḟaxа’mе ar’çepsmen na konuje’fkumen ‘turʧika.

[only rumtza ( . . . ) with my mum (.) my dad (.) my grandfather (.) but when we
came here we started speaking Turkish].

In terms of competence, it was evident across generations that older speakers were
more competent in Pontic Greek than younger ones, but this remains to be verified depend-
ing on the social network of the speakers. In addition, women appeared more competent
than men. Finally, we located some older people who remained monolingual in Pon-
tic Greek and had very limited knowledge of Turkish, as the case of Nahide from East
Karpasia.

Extract 8—Nahide

N: e’mis ‘rumdʒa konuje’fkumastе (.) tʰyːrktje pal ‘jani konuje’fkumе (.) ‘ama en
i’ksero po’la e’xo ‘turcica.
I: en i’kseris ‘turʧika po’la†
N: ‘ama katala’evo (.) (avlandu’revo).
I: ‘ama stο mex’tepin e’pies†
N: ‘oi.

[N: we speak Rumca (Pontic Greek) (.) we speak Turkish as well (.) but I don’t
know much Turkish.
I: You don’t speak Turkish?
N: I can understand (.) (I understand).
I: Did you go to school?
N: No].

Revealing were the points made by some of the participants who noted that the
speakers learned Turkish only when they arrived in Cyprus and they had to go to school.
This confirms Bortone’s (2009) findings where he asserts that in Trabzon villages, to this day
many Muslim Pontians report that they did not know Turkish until they went to school,
indicating that their Turkish was learnt rather than acquired (p. 74). This also contrasts
Zoumpalidis (2017) findings regarding the Pontic Greek community which arrived in
Cyprus in the 90s from Russia and Georgia. While this community had a strong multilingual
profile and were predominantly Turkish-speaking, upon their arrival in Cyprus Turkish
began to be on a decline.

During the interviews, it emerged that there was increased contact between Pontic
Greek and the local Cypriot Greek. All the participants who were over their 50s and
remembered coming in Cyprus in 1974, pointed out that during their first years in Cyprus,
Pontic Greek functioned as a bridge for them to adjust to the new space. Many of them used
Pontic Greek as the basis to learn Cypriot Greek. This is encapsulated in Yasin’s words:
[this (PG) helped me to learn Cypriot ( . . . ) when I came here in 77 I was 19 when I came (.) there were many Christians in the village ( . . . ) it helped me for sure ( . . . ) someone who does not know anything (.) cannot learn it like I did].

In the same manner, when we asked Yaman who came to Cyprus when he was twenty-one-year-old, whether Rumca (PG) helped him learn Cypriot Greek (CG), he replied “tabi tabi tabi [of course, of course, of course]. This was also confirmed in informal conversations with Greek Cypriots who remained “enclaved” in nearby villages. The Greek Cypriots pointed out that from all the Turkish nationals who came to Cyprus, the “Lazi” have learned Cypriot Greek and they are able to communicate with each other (fieldnotes).

Finally, as was observed during the interviews, although there was a Pontic Greek speaker in our research team, Nahide and Yasin chose to communicate with us mainly in Cypriot Greek. During all the interviews, most of the participants used Cypriot Greek variants and structures. This has been a revealing moment in fieldwork mostly because it indicates the local vitality of Cypriot Greek in the area. Although the majority of Greek Cypriots were displaced in 1974, the Cypriot Greek variety is still used by local Turkish Cypriots and the ‘enclave’ Greek Cypriots. The fact that the Pontic Greek speakers are expanding their repertoire to add Cypriot Greek indicates a sound vitality of the latter in the area.

5.3. Meta and Cross Linguistic Awareness

Despite the common assertion among the participants that Pontic Greek functioned a bridge for them to learn Cypriot Greek, during the discussions the strong differences between the two varieties were pointed out by almost all the speakers. In extract 10 below, Neyla stresses the similarities and differences between the two identifying words that have a different meaning in the two varieties (food, ‘fain’/CG, ‘psomin’/PG).

**Extract 10—Neyla**

‘eji pu ‘mjàzun po’la (.) ‘eji pu en ‘mjàzun ka’xolu ( . . . ) e’sis la’lite fa’ın e’mis la’lumen psomin.

[some (words) are alike some are not alike at all ( . . . ) you say ‘fain’ (food/CG) we say ‘psomin’ (food/PG)].

Similarly, Yasin and his wife Huriye, provided many examples of differences between the two varieties, exhibiting strong crosslinguistic awareness.

**Extract 11—Yasin**

eya’naxtesa (.) eya’naxtesa (.) epo’staxika ( . . . ) pa’ra’diyma ska’mli (.) a’fti la’lun to tsa’era (.) ‘ferme to tra’pezin (.) ‘fermu to tra’pezin (.) ko’nda.

[‘eya’naxtesa’ (I am tired/PG) (.) eya’naxtesa’ (I am tired/PG) (.) ‘epo’staxika’ (I am tired/CG) ( . . . ) for example ‘ ska’mli’ (chair/PG) (.) they call it ‘tsa’era’ (chair/CG) (.) ‘ferme’ (bring me/PG) the table (.) ‘fermu’ (bring me/CG) the table (.) (they are) close].

**Extract 12—Yasin & Huriye**

H: i mai’ria (.) e’mas i mai’ria fa’ın.

[‘mairia’ (food/PG) for us mairia is ‘fain’ (food/CG)].

Y: ka’ndila (.) e’mis ela’lusamen to bar’tak (.) ‘ome to bar’tak (.) bar’tak leksi ‘turciko.

[‘kandila’ (glass/CG), we used to say ‘bartak’ (glass/PG) (.) give me the bartak (glass/PG) (.) ‘bartak’ is a Turkish word].

H: mai’ria ma’irepsa (.) ‘tuti la’lun ‘ekama fa’ın (.) e’mis fa’in la’lumen to psu’min.

[mairia (food/PG) maiirepsa (I cooked food) (.) those here say I made ‘fain’ (food/CG) (.) for us ‘fain’ (food/CG) is the bread].
In extract 11 Yasin describes both lexical and grammatical differences between the two varieties. He mentions the Pontic Greek verb 
εγ'αναξτασα (I am tired) and he compares it with the respective Cypriot Greek 
επο’στασικα. Revealing here is the fact that Yasin refers to an obsolete and basilectal form of Cypriot Greek, a form of the local dialect that is used by other Turkish Cypriots/Romeika speakers (Ioannidou et al. 2020) but has become obsolete in the Cypriot koine spoken widely in the southern part of the island. Similarly, he comments on the syntactic differences (ferε me/fer’μυ/bring me). In the same manner, in extract 12, Yasin gives an example of the Cypriot word for glass (‘κανδιλά’); in this case too, his point of reference is a basilectal and rarely used word in contemporary Cypriot Greek, used mainly by older people or as a form of stylistic indexical (Tsipakou and Ioannidou 2012). Huriye provides further differences between the two varieties, providing different examples about the same word (fain) which has different meanings in the two varieties (food/CG, bread/PG).

5.4. Tensions in Language Contact

These noted differences between the two varieties increased the speakers’ metalinguistic awareness. However, in terms of language use and communication these differences often created tensions between the newcomers and the locals, between the newly arrived variety (Pontic Greek) and the local variety (Cypriot Greek). Some of the participants pointed out that their own variety has more similarities with the Greek spoken in Greece, rather than the local Romeika. In Extract 13 Ahmet compares his own variety with the Greek spoken in Instabul:

Extract 13—Ahmet

A: i’stambul i iz’miɾpu e’pien a tje xo’refkamen ’evra yu’nanli (.) me ’tfinus ka’litera.

[when I used to go to Istanbul and Izmir and we danced I met Yunanli (Greek from Greece) (.) with them it is better].

I: ’ama me ci’preika↑

[but with Cypriot?]

A: po’lar ’zorin.

[very difficult].

Evidently, these differences would often create issues of communication gap and unintelligibility. This is apparent in Ali’s story below.

Extract 14—Ali

pu ’irtamen ela’lusān mas pos ’pate ko’pe:çə(.) pa sta el;i’i’ka mas e’mas ko’pel:in en ’bastarto (.) ’pos ’pate¹ ja’ti en ’pate↑ ja’ti en ’fefcete↑ ( . . . ) pos ’pate ko’pe:çə ( . . . ) la’lo tu tu ’jitu mu mjan’ eran t’in din ji’nekan mjan i’meran na tin kupa’niso (.) la’li mu ja’ti (.) la’li mu ja’ti en ’fefcis re ’bastarte (.) pos ’pais ko’pelin (.) ’o’i je mu la’li mu (.) la’li su’ise ko’pelin (.) ise ’neos la’li mu ( . . . ) en ifθa’tθ’un i ’leksis.

[when we came here they used to say to us ‘pos pate koppellia(.’) in our Greek ‘koppellia’ is bastard (.) ‘pos pate (is) why don’t you go (.) why don’t you leave? ( . . . ) I say to my neighbour one day I will hit this woman (.) he tells me why? (I say) she says why don’t you leave you bastard ( . . . ) no my son he tells me (.) she says to you ‘kopelli’ (it means) you are young [LAUGHTER] the words don’t match].

Ali’s story indicates how the strong linguistic differences between the two varieties created misunderstandings which reflected wider issues of suspicion about the way the locals viewed these new communities. Ali’s first reaction, “she calls me bastard, I will hit her”, encapsulates wider political tensions regarding the political conflict and the status of the “settlers” in the area.
This is also reflected in Yaman’s account below:

**Extract 15—Yaman**

76 77 pu ‘irta da’pano ‘efj ‘enas (.) e’pexanen to’ra (.) la’li me pos ‘pais (.) pu na ‘pao la’lo tu (.) to’ra ‘irta (.) e’kamamen fas’a’rian (.) e’pia astino’mian (.) la’lo tu ‘extes ‘irta ston ‘tjirin mu (.) pu na ‘pao (.) la’li me pos ‘pais (.) e pu na ‘pao [LAUGHTER] la’li re (.) esu’ a:la ekata’laepses ‘tjinos ‘ala ekata’laepses (.) la’li ‘ipen ti ‘kamnis (.) la’li tu ‘tuti i trape’zundii ‘etsi ‘ylosan ‘etsi kata’la’enun la’li ‘alston (.) en ‘exo pa’raponon (.) ‘istera ‘pamen ba’rean gar’da’jis e’spernamen xo’rafca tu (.) e (.) ‘ylosa mas en etjhi’alhizen.

[(in) 76 77 when I came up here there was one (guy) (.) he died now (.) he tells me ‘pos pais’ (how are you/CG) (.) where should I go? I tell him (.) I just got here (.) we had a fight (.) I went to the police (.) I tell him I arrived yesterday at my father (.) where shall I go? (.) (this guy) tells me ‘pos pais’ (how are you/CG)? em where should I go? [laughter] he tells me (.) man this is not what he said (.) you understood something else (.) he understood something else (.) he told you how are you (.) he said (that) these (people from) Trabzon (.) this is how their language is (.) this is how they understand (.) let it go (.) I don’t have any complaint (.) after that we hanged out (.) (like) brothers (.) we sew his fields together ( . . . ) our language did not match.

Yaman’s account reveals the wider political tensions that surrounded the area after the de facto partition of the island. As he mentions, he decided to go to the police after he thought that his Greek Cypriot neighbor was asking him to leave. The communication gap which was created due to the different linguistic structures between the two varieties ended up in a heated political conflict, with Yaman protesting that he had nowhere else to go since he had just arrived at his dad. The police officer realized the linguistic gap and provided his interpretation (those from Trabzon speak differently) and then things were resolved. Over time, Yaman says that things improved, the linguistic gap was reduced and the daily practices and the sharing of the same space, improved human relations too.

The influence of space and of the wider sociopolitical trends were also indicated in Zoumpalidis (2016) study on Russian and Georgian Pontic Greeks in Cyprus. Contrary to the Pontic Greek speaking Turkish nationals who moved to the northern part of Cyprus, Russian Pontic Greeks were Turkish (Urum) speaking upon their arrival in Cyprus. However, the unresolved political problem on the island and the negative attitudes towards Turkish in the republic of Cyprus, placed a stigma on the public use of Urum (Turkish), leading the community to shift their use of Turkish, at least in the public domain.

6. Discussion

The communities of Pontic Greek speakers in Karpasia area in Cyprus exhibited expanding multilingual repertoires, adding on to their existing bilingualism between Turkish and Pontic Greek/Rumca/Lazika, the local Cypriot Greek variety. Although they retained a strong group identity regarding their place of origin (Trabzon), something that was indexed by their close social networks, their cultural practices (food, dance, music) and their common visits to Turkey, still the influence of space and of the new place is evident. In extract 16 below, Yusuf is using a hybrid form of the verb (we came/doerthame) and his wife Huriye is correcting him. Revealing is Yusuf’s comment that “we mix them, here that we have come”.

**Extract 16—Yusuf and Huriye**

Y: saranda’ðjo do’erðame.

H: ‘derðame [LAUGHTER].

Y: ‘derðame [LAUGHTER] ( . . . ) ‘derðame (.) e’mis neka’ton:umen ta to’ra (.) po’ða ‘purtamen.

E: me ta cip’rja’ka↑
Y: cipri’ka n:e.

[Y: (It’s been) forty-two (years) doerthame (we came here).
H: dethame [HIS WIFE CORRECTS HIM].
Y: derthame [LAUGHTER] derthame(.) we mix them now(.) here that we came.
E: with Cypriot?
H: Cypriot yes].

During the data collection process there were many other incidents as the above,
showing that they used the two varieties as indexicals to signal specific meaning but also
that they moved between the two varieties often creating new structures and forms.
The special status of these communities in the area, as ‘settlers’ or ‘immigrants”, had a major
influence on the way they perceived themselves in relation to the new geographical and
political space they found themselves into. Language obviously played a major role in this,
either as a means of convergence and better communication. i.e., using their Pontic Greek
as a bridge for learning Cypriot Greek, but also as a means of divergence and differentiation
i.e., instances of communication gap. In all these interactions, the pressing and repeating
phrase articulated by many of these participants, “Where shall I go” encapsulates their
linguistic and social claim for space and for belonging.

Eckert (2009) points out the importance of day-to-day exchange which involves con-
stant local reinterpretation and repositioning, arguing that with the focus on micro day-
to-day speech events we can avoid a “distant reflection of what is happening moment to
moment on the ground” (p. 472) and we can get at the meaning-making that gives life to
variation. The instances of language contact and the narratives produced from this contact
indicate the way people construe their social belonging across territories (Britain 2013) but
also that people’s mobility and daily practices contribute to an on-going construction and
erosion of border (Mitsch 2016). This is encapsulated in Neyla’s words, “hem di ‘losa:
mu hem ‘rumdʒa hem ‘lazdʒa”, “I speak my language, and Rumca and Lasdzà”. It also
becomes very strong in Yaman’s closing words (extract 15) that although their language did
not match, “we were together like brothers, sewing the fields”. According to Blommaert’s
concept of superdiversity (2013), this crossings and co-existence of multiple linguistic vari-
eties in individual and community repertoires, is characterized by complexity, mobility and
unpredictability, creating what he calls “unstable sociolinguistic communities”. The daily
linguistic practices of Pontic Greek/Lazi/Rumca speakers in Karpasia and their ongoing
efforts to expand their repertoire to adjust to the new social space, confirms Blommaert’s
(2013) point that communities like this provide evidence for questioning the foundations of
our knowledge and our assumptions about societies.

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Notes
1 http://www.prio-cyprus-displacement.net, accessed on 3 January 2020.
2 Apart from the area of Karpasia, Pontic Greek speakers are also found in villages close to Morfu and Kormakitis area but these
were not explored in the current project.
3 CG: Cypriot Greek, PG: Pontic Greek.
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