Language battles in the linguistic landscape of a divided capital: a comparative study of political economies of Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot commercial establishments

Article

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Language battles in the linguistic landscape of a divided capital: A comparative study of political economies of Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot commercial establishments

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In this paper we explore multilingual practices in the Linguistic Landscape which are geared towards commercial goals. We study simultaneously the commercial areas of two conflict-affected communities in Nicosia (Cyprus) which are divided by a UN-controlled buffer zone. Ledras (Greek-Cypriot) is a street in the south and Arasta (Turkish-Cypriot) is in the north of the divide. We investigate how these communities' political economies and ideologies shape language choice in public space and how the language of the other community, namely Greek or Turkish, are discursively framed as economically valuable or worthless. Photographs of shopfront signs and a thematic analysis of interviews with shopkeepers revealed that language choice in Nicosia's commercial area is highly strategic. We demonstrate that this area is a politically and economically charged space where language battles, triggered by power relations, differing language hierarchies, ideologies and political economies, become visible in the linguistic landscape.

Keywords: political economy, multilingualism, ideologies, shopfront signs, conflict, Cyprus

1. Introduction

In commercial streets there is an abundance of signs, many of which are placed with economic considerations in mind. Shopfront signs are public texts which serve different

functions like advertising products and services and informing passers-by about the nature of shops. They are produced based on who is perceived to be the target audience and what their commercial desires are thought to be (Lou, 2007). Trinch and Snajdr (2020) argue that shop signs are important to study because they are sociolinguistic technologies of place-making that operate through specific language ideologies, which can in turn shape the Linguistic Landscape (henceforth LL).

The choice of linguistic resources on signs is crucial, especially when it comes to multilingual communities. As Themistocleous (2019) explains, linguistic choices are not random; they are linked to communities' sociohistorical experiences, their language policies and issues related to identity, ideologies and, as we will demonstrate, political economies. All these surface in any society, but they can be exacerbated in conflict-ridden communities. Many scholars explored the LL of commercial areas around the world (section 2), however, not many have focused on divided communities. The aim of this study therefore is to fill this research gap by exploring the political economies and ideologies that circulate in the public space of divided communities, in an attempt to understand what makes some linguistic resources more economically valuable than others in post conflict contexts.

The present study is significant for two reasons. First, it simultaneously explores two divided communities: the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities in Cyprus. These have been affected by long-term conflict and a war in 1974, which resulted in their division by a UN-controlled buffer zone. Previous work in central Nicosia, the capital, has revealed that the language of the other is excluded from each community's LL, indexing nationalist ideologies in public space (Themistocleous,

2019). However, Themistocleous (2019; 2020; 2021) also reports that pro-reconciliation ideologies have slowly started to surface in this dynamic and changing context. As the two communities slowly move forward from their conflict-affected past, studying how ideologies and political economies influence language choice can unveil how issues of marginalisation, exclusion, and economic inequality surface in the LL of divided communities. Second, this study focuses on the creators of signs, namely shopkeepers from the two communities. Studying authorship is a crucial area for LL research and one that is understudied in the broader literature. Our study reveals how social actors interact with public signs and expose their attitudes and ideologies towards different linguistic resources and their speakers, as well as the economic values these resources are perceived to have. Exploring these aspects from a political economic perspective can help us understand the underlying principles of language choice within the marketplace of divided cities and the authors' role in shaping the LL.

2. The political economy of language and space

According to Block (2017: 35) political economy 'focuses on and analyses the relationship between the individual and society and between the market and the state, and it seeks to understand how social institutions, their activities and capitalism interrelate'. In applied linguistics, a perspective informed by political economy applies these ideas to study real-world problems in which language is a central issue**.** By seeing language as resource, Del Percio et al. (2017: 56) conceptualize political economy as 'the technologies and processes governing the valuation of resources as well as their production, circulation, and consumption within a given place and at a specific moment

in time'. Studying language and political economy is crucial as it enables us to understand the complexities of modern societies, especially with current societal changes such as globalisation, superdiversity and increased mobility (Del Percio et al., 2017). According to Duchêne and Heller (2012), all these societal changes may influence how language practices operate and create new language needs and possibilities.

In 1989, Gal and Irvine foregrounded the idea of 'political economy' in sociolinguistics, calling on researchers not just to study language practices in relation to society but also explore the value and role languages play when it comes to political economic concerns. The idea that languages have different roles and values is not new. Bourdieu (1977, 1991) advocated that linguistic practices can be seen as symbolic assets, or in other words as linguistic capital. They may have different values, which can also translate into economic value, depending on whether they are thought to be legitimate, prestigious, and valuable or illegitimate and worthless (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). According to Bourdieu (1984), the attribution of value is not inherent, but rather emerges within a given society based on individuals' ability to produce linguistic practices that are considered to be the most prestigious.

Bourdieu's ideas have been adopted by many, but they have also been criticised for their static description of the valuation processes (see Gal, 1989; Irvine, 1989). Heller (2011) emphasised that to understand how valuation processes work, we should not just presume what the languages' values and roles are, but instead unveil the ideological stances that circulate within communities which legitimise certain linguistic resources over others. Moreover, we should explore how these valuation processes are

discursively enacted, naturalised, or challenged by social actors. To understand how all these processes work, ethnographically informed procedures should be applied to unveil people's experiences, perspectives, and everyday practices.

In 2021, the 12th Linguistic Landscape Workshop invited scholars to take a closer look at political economy in public space and explore the language hierarchies that prevail in different spatiotemporal contexts. Before that, researchers explored signs in commercial spheres around the world with many focusing on multilingualism. Studies highlighted the symbolic power of English as an emblematic marker of globalization, with its use on public signs reflecting a desire to project a modern, cosmopolitan, and sophisticated outlook (Nikolaou, 2017; Vandenbroucke, 2016; Weyers, 2016; Yuan, 2019).

Other studies focused on minority languages. Calvi and Uberti-Bona (2020) found that Spanish in migrant traders' shop signs in Milan index a collective identity for Latin American community members. Lipovsky (2019) who studied shopfront signs in a Parisian immigrant neighbourhood found that shopkeepers used their languages to gain visibility in the LL, highlight their cultural diversity, and create solidarity with their target audience. Similar results have been reported by Shang and Guo (2017) about the use of Chinese in Singapore's ethnically heterogenous neighbourhood centres. However, Shang and Guo (2017) also report that Malay and Indian shop owners, who are the minority, de-emphasised their ethnic languages to attract customers from all ethnic groups and sustain their business. Hult and Kelly-Holmes (2019), who focused on only one shop in Singapore's Chinatown, noticed that the owner used Scandinavian on their signs, something that appeared to be an anomaly in this public space where

English and Chinese predominate. The owner explained that they used these strategic semiotic resources to initially develop a customer base among Scandinavian sailors, but thereafter as a marketing practice to differentiate their shop from others in the area. Hult and Kelly-Holmes (2019) emphasise the importance of studying such 'anomalies' as they can reveal individuals' locally situated choices and how these are influenced by economic flows of people and capital.

These studies offer valuable insights into different language hierarchies in the LL of commercial areas around the world. The present study however brings into play aspects of conflict over territory and processes of everyday peace.[1] Various studies have been conducted exploring the LL of conflict-affected communities. The case of Israel has been explored by Ben-Rafael et al. (2006), Trumper-Hecht (2009) and Amara (2019), with all three identifying 'language battles' in public space between Hebrew and Arabic. Pavlenko (2009) explored post-Soviet countries and found that Moldova, Ukraine, Latvia, and Kyrgyzstan adopted de-sovietisation policies to distance themselves from Russia. Muth (2014) reports that the self-declared Republic of Transnistria did the opposite, preserving close links with Russia. In our study, we bring into play aspects of political economy to explore the LL of two communities in Cyprus which are culturally, politically, and economically distinct due to the long-term conflict on the island.

[1] 'Everyday peace' refers to routinised practices used by ordinary people to navigate their way through life in divided societies. Small acts of peace may lead to conflict disruption and move society towards conflict transformation (Mac Ginty, 2021).

3. Conflict and political economy in Cyprus

The Republic of Cyprus (RoC) gained its independence from Great Britain in 1960 but a turbulent period of inter-communal enmity between Turkish-Cypriots and Greek-Cypriots led to a war in 1974. This resulted in the de facto division of the island to Greek-Cypriot south and Turkish-Cypriot north. A UN-controlled buffer zone, known as the Green Line, still separates the two communities and divides Nicosia, the capital (Mallinson, 2009). In 1983, the north part was self-declared as an independent state, known as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), a state recognised only by Turkey (Mallinson, 2009). Today, the 'Cyprus problem' is regarded as intractable. Armed forces are present on both sides and the United Nations Peace Keeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) remains on the island.

The war's aftermath resulted in economic catastrophe for both communities (Strong, 2000). The geopolitical separation meant that Cyprus had two economies, two governments, and no trade or movement of people across the Green Line (Yorucu et al., 2010). Despite the disaster, development in the RoC has shown remarkable economic growth up to the 1990s. However, the economy of the TRNC, which is smaller and more isolated due to an international embargo, depends heavily on Turkey for its economic survival (Trimikliniotis et al., 2012).

In 2003, movement was permitted for the first time at designated crossing-points across the Green Line. The Ledras/Lokmacı crossing-point, located in the heart of Nicosia's commercial area, opened in 2008. This bold and historic step generated a major trade expansion between the two communities and boosted the economic gains in

the area. Also, the more isolated Turkish-Cypriot businesses benefited greatly from an increasing influx of Greek-Cypriot customers and tourists (Jacobson et al., 2009).

In 2004, the RoC joined the EU and continued to flourish economically. The TRNC, however, was not part of the deal, and its per capita income lagged behind that of the more prosperous Greek-Cypriot south (Trimikliniotis et al., 2012). Recent developments have seen both sides falling into economic recession with austerity measures being introduced. Today, the economically stronger south has managed to overcome recession, but the more economically vulnerable north is comparably less well-off, relying on the unstable Turkish lira.

4. Language, ideologies and conflict in Cyprus

Language use is a sensitive issue for the two communities since it is closely linked to ethnic identities (Karoulla-Vrikkis, 2010). When Cyprus gained its independence, Greek and Turkish were declared the constitutional official languages in the RoC, while Turkish is the only constitutional official language in the TRNC (Hadjioannou et al., 2011). Greek is the dominant language with 679,883 native speakers (CYSTAT, 2013), while Turkish is spoken by 20% of the population (Öztürk, 2009). English is widely used in Cyprus due to the country's colonial past and because it is associated with globalisation and modernity (Fotiou, 2022). Since most Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots do not speak each other's language, English, a neutral language, is often used as a lingua franca (Karoulla-Vrikkis, 2010). In an emblematic gesture to promote peacebuilding, Greek and Turkish were introduced as optional foreign languages into each community's public education in 2003. While Turkish-Cypriots held positive

attitudes towards learning Greek (Tum et al., 2016), learning Turkish was considered by most Greek-Cypriots as a betrayal (Charalambous et al., 2017).

Strong nationalist ideologies that demonise the other and promote one-sided historical narratives of victimisation exist in both communities and are often fed by official master narratives through public education and mass media (Makriyianni et al., 2011; Şahin, 2022). Although there have been attempts at official levels to tone down nationalist discourses, they still remain dominant in both communities (Charalambous et al., 2017). Alternative pro-reconciliation ideologies that promote an independent Cypriot identity also exist (Papadakis, 2005), but such counter-discourses are often considered damaging by most of the population (Themistocleous, 2021). It should be mentioned that these ideologies relate closely to political affiliations, with right-wing political parties promoting nationalism and left-wing ones promoting Cypriotism.

Regarding policies for language use on public signage, our review of the existing legislation showed that there are no laws enforced or directives provided by the local authorities in the TRNC. According to the RoC's constitution, both Greek and Turkish should appear in public documents and government buildings, however beyond these contexts, Turkish is not used. Attempting to promote Cypriotism, a bill was submitted in the 1990s to make the use of Greek and Turkish on public and commercial signs in the RoC obligatory. After a parliamentary debate the bill failed, as strong nationalist tendencies which disfavoured the use of Turkish prevailed at the time (Karoulla-Vrikkis, 2013).

Themistocleous (2019) explored the LL of central Nicosia and found that the language of the other is widely excluded from each community's public signage. This

exclusion indexes the two communities' territorial limits and language boundaries but also reproduces nationalist ideologies in public space. However, the LL of the Ledras/Lokmacı crossing-point is different as both Greek and Turkish alongside English are visible in official and ephemeral signs. Themistocleous (2020; 2021) explains that the neutralised character of the buffer zone (a space controlled by the UN and funded by the EU), enables pro-reconciliation ideologies that foster unification and peace to surface. Yet, beyond this point linguistic gatekeeping is mostly at play. However, an interesting finding emerged regarding commercial signs; while Turkish was mostly absent from Greek-Cypriot shopfront signs, some signs that contained Greek were found in the north. This phenomenon is investigated further in this study.

In this paper we build on previous work, going beyond the signs themselves to studying agency, authorship, and production of shopfront signs. We investigate how shopkeepers in the two commercial areas make decisions about which languages to include or exclude from their shopfront signage and how these decisions relate to the underlying political economies and ideologies in this divided capital.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Data collection

The area under investigation is in the heart of central Nicosia. Its geographical position is noteworthy not only because of its proximity to the Ledras/Lokmacı crossing-point, but also because the main commercial street, which is about 1 kilometre long, is divided by the Green Line. About 800 metres lies in the Greek-Cypriot community (Ledras), 150 metres in the Turkish-Cypriot (Arasta), and approximately 80 meters of UN-

patrolled ‘No-man’s land’ divides the two. The Ledras/Lokmacı crossing-point allows pedestrians to cross between the two communities by foot, making this area a significant space that both divides and connects the two.

Ledras and Arasta are busy commercial streets that attract locals and visitors from the other community, who cross over for shopping, services, or entertainment. The historical significance of the old city also attracts large numbers of tourists all year round. It has been noted that in 2021, almost 114,461 people used this crossing-point to cross between the two sides (Özgür Gazete, 2023). Although both are busy commercial areas, Ledras is more economically developed, Westernised and modern with local businesses and global franchises. Due to the international embargo, Arasta has smaller, local shops and a bazaar, where inexpensive items are displayed outside the shops, giving the area a more traditional character. Retail prices tend to be lower in Arasta compared to Ledras (Yorucu, et al., 2010).

In this study we used interviews in combination with photographs of shop signs from the two communities. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 Greek-Cypriot shopkeepers from Ledras and 10 Turkish-Cypriot shopkeepers from Arasta. Discussion topics included business history, staff and clientele demographics, language repertoires and language practices, languages on shop signs and what factors influenced their choice, how they think shop signs construct the vicinity and how this may affect their business. Each semi-structured interview lasted between 30 minutes to 1 hour and they were conducted in the participants’ native language (i.e., Greek or Turkish). Pseudonyms are used throughout the study.

Our data show that shopkeepers from both communities mainly use English on their shopfront signs, providing further support to Themistocleous's (2019) findings that English is the dominant language in Nicosia's LL. While the role of English is undeniably significant and highlighted in previous studies (see section 2), this study will only focus on Greek and Turkish, the two local languages. Some Turkish-Cypriot shopkeepers reported that they use Greek, whereas the opposite can be said about Greek-Cypriot shopkeepers. These 'anomalies' (Hult & Kelly-Holmes, 2019) or even what is not visible in the LL, are worth investigating as they can yield insights into situated experiences and reveal how issues related to division, political economies, and ideologies shape the LL of this divided capital.

5.2.Analytical framework

Once the data were collected, they were transcribed verbatim and translated in English to allow for common themes to be identified across the two data sets. The data were then uploaded into NVivo for qualitative, thematic analysis. Instead of using pre-determined categories, themes emerged as the textual data was coded through several readings (Miles et al., 2020; Saldana, 2021).

Two cycles of coding were conducted on all data sets simultaneously. In the first, two focal points were examined: a) shopkeepers' perspectives on the languages used on their signage, and b) ideologies that could signal wider political and economic stances in relation to the conflict in Cyprus. Some examples of codes in the first cycle were 'Language of the enemy', 'Greek language as income', 'Incorrect language use on signs', 'Crossing the border to shop' and so on. We also had in-vivo codes, which

quoted participants' words directly and recurred in the data frequently for instance 'fascist people' and 'peaceful co-existence'. In the second cycle, code relationships were established through a series of axial and in-vivo coding procedures within each data set and then comparisons were conducted across the two data sets. Overall, three dominant themes were established:

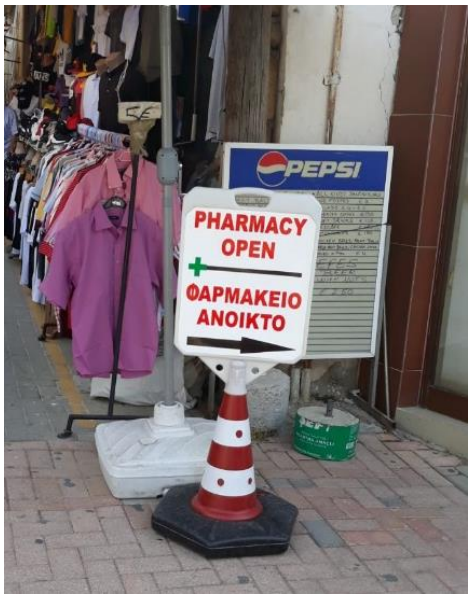
1) language as economic resource;
2) language as part of the division;
3) language as act of everyday peace.

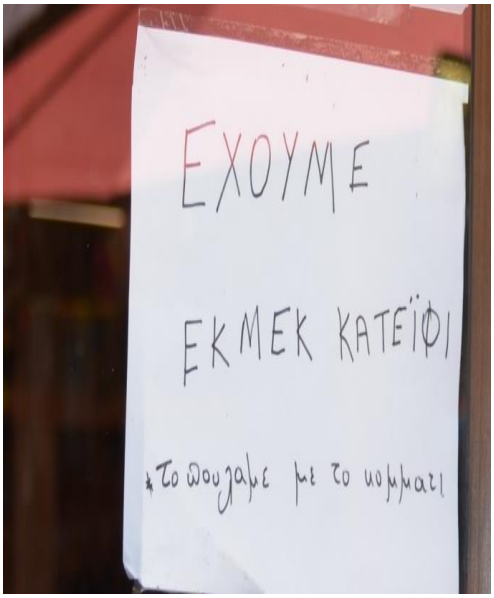
Each theme is discussed in the next section.

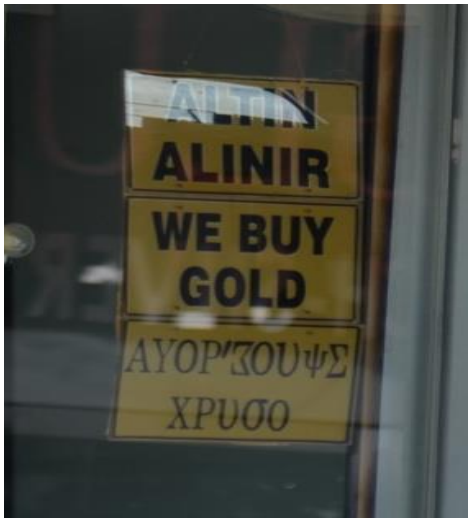
6. Analysis

6.1. Language as economic resource

As mentioned in section 3, the Greek-Cypriot community enjoys economic superiority while the economy in the north is more fragile. Our photographic data indicates that some Turkish-Cypriot shopkeepers use Greek on their shopfront signs to overcome this imbalance and attract Greek-speaking customers. Figure 1 shows some representative examples of signs we found in Arasta. The sign in Figure (1a) is bilingual in English and Greek targeting wider audiences, while the sign in (1b) is in Greek, directly targeting Greek-speaking customers. A closer look at other signs revealed that the Greek used was in fact incorrect. For example, the signs in (1c) and (1d) contain words that are misspelled in Greek, while the Greek translation in (1d) is inaccurate.

a) 

b) 

c) 

d) 

Figure 1. Use of Greek in Arasta

These non-standard elements suggest that sign makers lack formal education in Greek. Yet, as Trinch and Snajdr (2020: 57–58) explain, despite the use of non-standard forms, these signs are 'operating' in the LL since they are displayed in public space and convey to passers-by information about the shops. Although the use of incorrect Greek could create an image of an unreliable business, in this context it can be seen as an

emblematic move, indexing to Greek-speaking customers that the shopkeeper is using whatever linguistic capital they have in Greek to overcome language boundaries and create solidarity with them. This was evident in the interviews we had with shopkeepers from Arasta which unveiled ideological stances that legitimise their use of Greek as economic resource. Ahmet, a café owner, explained that he learned how to write some Greek words and started using them on his signs to explicitly attract Greek-Cypriot customers.

(1) '... because there are lots of locals from the south coming here as well so [...] I even used Greek at some point on my signs. Like the Ekmek Kadayıfı [traditional Cypriot dessert] in Greek. We learned it and used it.' (Ahmet, TC)

Other shopkeepers also said that their customer base is heavily dependent on Greek-Cypriot clientele and visibility of Greek on their signs helps overcome the language barrier for those who do not know Turkish or English. For instance, Makbule, the owner of another café, stressed that there was more demand for Ekmek Kadayıfı once its name was written in Greek and that their business was positively impacted by the language choice on their signage:

(2) 'It helps, they do come but when you use it, they like it even more. It can be attractive to those who do not speak English or Turkish. Let me give you an example, I sell Ekmek Kadayıfı every now and then and when I put it in

Greek on my sign board, we get a lot of demand, so I guess it helps. It definitely helps.' (Makbule, TC)

Kemal, the owner of a textiles shop, talked extensively about how he tries to speak Greek with Greek-Cypriot customers and how they use Greek on their shopfront signs despite negative reactions from some Turkish-speaking customers. Kemal said it is important to use Greek on his signs because '99% of my customers are Greek.' In fact, losing the Turkish-Cypriot customers would not affect their business as badly as losing Greek-Cypriots. His description of those who oppose the use of Greek was very strong, referring to them as 'fascist' and 'ordinary', distancing himself from them by 'not caring' about their reaction:

(3) 'There are fascist people like this, who react [to Greek signs]. It's sad but ordinary people can have these kinds of reactions. But I didn't care.' (Kemal, TC)

Valuation processes in the south, where economy is robust, were different as most Greek-Cypriot shopkeepers did not discursively frame Turkish as economically valuable. Indicating that he does not have many Turkish-speaking customers, Spyros, a gift shop owner, said that not using Turkish on their signs would not cause them loss of income, therefore he did not need to attract customers from the north: 'for me, at least, I have few Turks so I don't think it would affect me.' Similarly, Michalis, a clothing shop owner, mentioned that there was no financial benefit having Turkish on their signage

because nowadays it is difficult for someone from the north to buy products and services from the south, as these are far more expensive:

(4) ‘At the beginning, I had [customers from the north] but then I lost them because of the rate. It was not cost-effective for them to shop because they considered this market expensive, got it? Meaning that the exchange rate of euro to Turkish lira did not allow people to shop and this is normal.’ (Michalis, GC)

However, an anomaly appeared in the LL of Ledras when one sign that contained Turkish was identified during our fieldwork. Figure 2 is a shopfront sign of a British international chain of hairdressing salons which advertises training sessions. The main message (“NOW ACCEPTING ENROLMENT”) is presented at the top in three languages, with English being prioritised as this is an international franchise, followed by Greek (“ΑΡΧΙΣΑΝ ΟΙ ΕΓΓΡΑΦΕΣ”) the local language and then by Turkish (“ŞİMDİ KAYIT KABUL”) the language of the other community. The form of Turkish used on this sign appears to be a direct translation of the English version, which does not sound pragmatically correct as it lacks the auxiliary verb at the end. Hence, a similar case to the incorrect Greek signs observed in the north can be seen here.

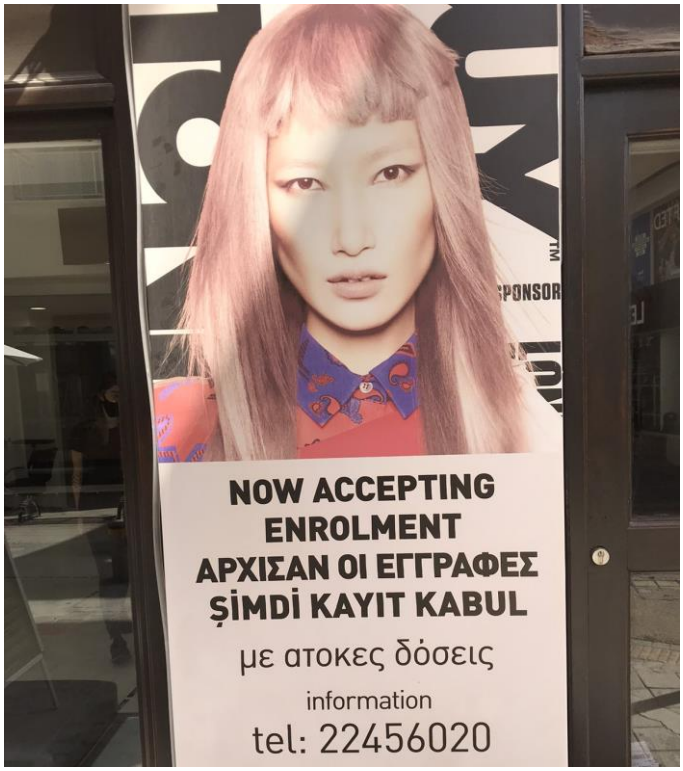


Figure 2. Use of Turkish in Ledras

In our interview, Dimitris, the manager, revealed locally situated choices that explain the use of Turkish on this shopfront sign. He stated that the only reason Turkish was used was due to a decision made by the franchise company:

(5) '[…] the reason that we did that is because they asked for it. Meaning that we had many enquiries from prospective students that would enrol so we were obliged to show that we want them.' (Dimitris, GC)

Although he is the manager of the shop, his use of the plural pronoun 'we' when describing the choice of Turkish shows that this was a corporate decision, not a personal

one. He states that they were ‘obliged’ to include Turkish to show that they ‘wanted’ Turkish-Cypriot students. He then explained that this was simply a ‘business move’ made by the headquarters and that it had nothing to do with peaceful co-existence:

(6) ‘This moment you entered an English business. So, it has nothing to do… The head of the office, the director, the franchisor, is English. So, it has nothing to do […] with peaceful co-existence.’ (Dimitris, GC)

Ambivalence was evident in Dimitris’s interview. On the one hand, he said that he did not have taboos and in fact he made Turkish-Cypriot friends through his work, stating also that ‘the way I see a Greek-Cypriot is the same as I see a Turkish-Cypriot.’ But at the same time, he mentioned that he would not have used Turkish on the sign if this business decision was made by him, distancing himself once again from the corporate decision.

Overall, our photographic data and interviews with social actors show that there is greater desire among Turkish-Cypriot shopkeepers to use the language of the other community, even if this is frowned upon by their own community members. These shopkeepers see Greek as an economic resource and seem willing to respond to clientele changes, facilitated by the ease of movement restrictions, and target wealthier customers from the south. This was not evident in Ledras as Greek-Cypriot shopkeepers do not seem to depend on Turkish-speaking clientele. However, our discussion with Dimitris revealed that sometimes individual intentions are overridden by corporate power, especially when it comes to international chains who have authority over the creation

and design of business signage. While our discussion with Dimitris unveiled the reasons why Turkish was used on one sign, it did not provide adequate explanation for the exclusion of Turkish from the LL of Ledras. Interviews with other Greek-Cypriot shopkeepers shed more light on this issue.

6.2. Language as part of the division

So far, we saw that Turkish was not discursively framed by our Greek-Cypriot participants as economically valuable, which can partly explain its lack of visibility in the LL of Ledras. However, our interviews with Greek-Cypriot shopkeepers revealed additional ideological stances that consider Turkish as an illegitimate language. Many participants in Ledras reported that they would not consider displaying signs in Turkish because this would stir up negative feelings from their own community and could result in losing their Greek-Cypriot customers. Makis, a café owner, said 'I can't put Turkish here, here is a Greek part', hinting that this act would be frowned upon by the Greek-Cypriot community. Others shared similar concerns. For instance, Ilias, a restaurant owner, expressed fear of losing customers who may have 'extreme right-wing views' or in other words strong nationalist ideologies (see section 4):

(7) 'We have many customers who have extreme right-wing views, so you automatically lose those customers. If you count and compare how many Turkish-Cypriot customers you have and how many from the others [i.e. Greek-Cypriots], you do not risk of losing the [Greek]-Cypriots.' (Ilias, GC)

Spyros, the owner of a gift shop, expressed concerns about being considered pro-Turkish (i.e., a traitor):

(8) ‘There is some prejudice. Now if I write in Turkish, at the end, they will consider me to be a Turk. I don’t know, this is how I take it. I don’t know. I think that people’s psychology… I don’t think that they want to see Turkish words in this area.’ (Spyros, GC)

Michalis, a clothing shop owner, highlighted that: ‘we are not open minded as a society to be able to accept some change … it may negatively affect my business.’ He went on to explain that using Turkish on signs would be a provocation within his own community and although he is progressive, he has ‘values’ and does not want to negatively affect other people:

(9) ‘I want to maintain some balance; I don’t want to play it as a progressive man. In some issues I am progressive, in other issues I have values so as not to negatively affect some other people.’ (Michalis, GC)

Our analysis shows that resistance to use the language of the other community stems from these shopkeepers’ evaluation of stances of the wider community. Going against the anticipated political views of their Greek-Cypriot clientele results in fear of being considered pro-Turkish, potentially losing those customers, and leaving them financially worse off.

For others, however, it was a personal decision. This was evident in two interviews. Giannos said that while he would welcome Turkish-speaking customers in his shop, he would not explicitly target them using their language:

(10) 'Of course, it's good for the business for the shop but I personally wouldn't want to put [signs in Turkish] […] Did you understand what I am trying to tell you? I am not a strong fanatic, but I'm … For example, if someone comes now and tells me for example that he is a Turkish-Cypriot and stuff like that I will welcome them, I will treat them the same way I will treat anyone, of course. But I wouldn't promote my shop to Turkish people, to encourage Turkish people to come and shop. I wouldn't do that. Now, if they come, they are more than welcome to come and buy.' (Giannos, GC)

Achilleas, the owner of an ice cream parlour who has been operating his business in the area for more than 50 years, expressed the strongest views. He was adamant that he would not use Turkish on his signs because he does not want Turkish-Cypriot customers:

(11) 'Let me tell you something, I would never make an effort to attract Turkish-Cypriot customers. They do come, they come, they prefer my shop because it's a big shop with a garden. They are welcomed but I am telling you that, at the bottom of my soul, and it's not like I am a person who will hurt someone, it's just I cannot erase it [i.e. the conflict] from my feelings. The

> things I felt. I cannot forgive them. […] Yes, if you are trying to attract them using their language, it means that you want them. And I don't want them, do you understand? And if no one comes to my shop, I don't care.'
> (Achilleas, GC)

Achilleas's negative discourse is linked to his strong nationalist ideologies which consider the people across the divide as the 'enemy'. Despite their strong nationalistic arguments which entailed separatist ideologies, both Giannos and Achilleas claimed that they are not 'strong fanatics' or a 'person who will hurt someone' to distance themselves from the discourse of enmity. This signals that they are aware of pro-reconciliation ideologies that circulate in the community, yet, their own ideological stance is different, and it dictates their linguistic choices on their shopfront signage. These kinds of nationalist ideologies are very strong especially in the Greek-Cypriot community and combined with the fact that the south is economically robust, they result in the exclusion of Turkish in the LL of Ledras.

Overall, we can see that in the Greek-Cypriot community political economy and nationalist ideologies impact on shopkeepers' linguistic practices and prevent them from seeing Turkish as economically valuable or even legitimate. Instead, Turkish is associated with conflict and therefore excluded from shopfront signage, making the LL of Ledras less diverse than that of Arasta.

6.3. Language as act of everyday peace

In line with Themistocleous (2019; 2020; 2021) who found that ideologies of peace and unification have slowly started to surface in the LL of Nicosia, our interviews with Sadiye (TC) and Despina (GC) also unveiled some progressive ideologies of reconciliation.

Sadiye gave us a compelling description of why she, an employee of an accessories shop in Arasta, uses Greek on their shopfront signs. Like other Turkish-Cypriot shopkeepers (see section 6.1) Sadiye uses Greek to target Greek-Cypriot customers and increase their sales. Talking about those who criticised her use of Greek, Sadiye was defensive about their language choice and stated that pretending Greek-Cypriots 'don't exist' is 'impossible.'

(12) 'Yes, fine, I'm Turkish myself but I co-exist with them here and I don't only serve you, I serve them as well. So, if I am writing things for you to understand, I also need to write it for them to understand, it's only normal. But then again, this is only few people, I am not generalizing at all. So what? We have euro on the boards. These people buy from us and help us earn, so why not? That was the reaction I got; pretend they [Greek-Cypriots] don't exist? It's impossible. Just because we speak different languages or have different religion or nationality… this is at least something we need to change and impose on the next generation.' (Sadiye, TC)

Sadiye's use of 'so what?' and 'so why not?' shows that she is not bothered by negative reactions from members of her own community and that she is confident that using Greek is the right move for their business. Interestingly, Sadiye's reasons were not only restricted to financial benefits. Despite using an 'us – them' discourse which predominates in both communities (see section 4), Sadiye said that using Greek on business signs is 'normal' and a 'must' also making reference to a 'mixed culture' on the island which requires the use of both languages (and as a matter of fact 'any language'). She explicitly said that she welcomes the idea of diversity and co-existence. Also, she signalled a possibility for change in terms of social integration in the long run by referring to the 'next generation', highlighting the necessity to encourage young people to move away from ideologies of division and embrace reconciliation:

(13) 'Because it's a mixed culture I believe it has to be written, Greek must be written or if there is any other culture, that has to be written as well. I welcome this idea very well and I appreciate it, this is how it should be. […].' (Sadiye, TC)

On the other side of the divide, Despina also showed an inclination to reconciliation, albeit not as explicit as Sadiye's. When we asked Despina if she would consider using Turkish on their shopfront signs, her response was 'Maybe yes.' This was surprising because she was the only Greek-Cypriot participant who did not directly reject this idea. We asked her why and she responded: 'Ok because some of them [i.e., Turkish-Cypriots] may not know English so to be able to understand. If I knew Turkish

I would.' Despina's responses showed some willingness to include the language of the other community, or even learn it, to breach the communication gap between her and Turkish-speaking clients. She said that this would be a positive move especially for Turkish-Cypriots who would feel welcomed if they see their language is visible on shopfront signs. Yet, despite her positive predisposition, Despina also seemed to be affected by the anticipated political views of the Greek-Cypriot community, mentioning that there are people 'who would not want coexistence with Turkish-Cypriots':

(14) 'Positively for the Turkish-Cypriots who were to feel that they are more welcomed if you add Turkish letters. […] But negatively for the ones who do not want the coexistence with Turkish-Cypriots.' (Despina, GC)

Overall, the interviews with Sadiye and Despina show that some shopkeepers view the language of the other community not only as an economic resource but also as a way of overcoming the conflict. These positive predispositions towards reconciliation are expressed by the minority of our participants and seem to be in tension with ideologies of division discussed in previous sections. However, the fact that they emerged in our data shows that they slowly start to surface despite strong nationalist ideologies in the wider community.

7. Discussion and Conclusions

As the only divided capital in Europe, Nicosia's historically commercial area is a culturally, politically, and economically charged space. The conflict and geopolitical division of the island has led to an economic imbalance across the two communities; the south is financially robust while the north is in deep economic crisis. At the same time, this area is a dynamic and changing context. The opening of the Ledras/Lokmaci crossing-point led to a significant societal change that transformed Nicosia's commercial centre. New economic prospects, facilitated by increased mobility of people and goods across the divide, created new language needs as shopkeepers and clientele from the two communities are now engaged in transactional encounters.

The main contribution of our study in LL research is not only that it simultaneously investigates the commercial areas of two conflict-affected communities but also that it combines photographic data and semi-structured interviews with social actors. This enabled us to not restrict the analysis on what is visible in the research locales but complement it with a discussion of issues of authorship, agency, ideologies, political beliefs, and perceptions of the LL. Our study unveiled how language valuation processes are handled and enacted by shopkeepers, who, in turn, become agents in shaping the LL of this divided capital.

Decisions are complex and strongly influenced by shopkeepers' broader political and economic positionality. Themistocleous (2019) refers to gatekeeping as a way of excluding the language of the other from the LL. Exclusion was evident in our data too, mainly in the Greek-Cypriot commercial area. Apart from one case, we found that the Greek-Cypriots' linguistic practices were affected by peer pressure and fear of being

seen to betray the values of their own community. Moreover, personal views that reflected hegemonic nationalist ideologies were also evident among some Greek-Cypriot shopkeepers with some explicitly excluding Turkish-speaking customers. Our study, however, shows that gatekeeping may not always be a limiting action. By including the language of the other community, shopkeepers in Arasta were providing opportunities for their Greek-Cypriot customers to access their goods, acting as gatekeepers who, in this case, allow others in, rather than keeping them out. Our interviews revealed that shopkeepers in the north are mostly driven by economic considerations and use whatever linguistic capital they have in Greek as a resource to attract wealthier customers from the south. Marketing and business become more important than conflict as nationalist ideologies are slowly toned down. Overall, economic inequality in the north necessitates political compromise, while it facilitates ideological rigidity in the south.

Yet, similarly to Themistocleous (2019, 2020, 2021), processes of everyday peace also emerged in our data. Two of our participants expressed progressive ideologies of peaceful coexistence, showing willingness to use the language of the other community on their shopfront signs. While others were reluctant to do so, we found that almost all had everyday intergroup contact with clients across the divide. As the two communities move on from their post-conflict past, political economies and conflict-peace ideologies start to overlap, gradually leading to bottom-up, localised acts of everyday peace. As Mac Ginty (2021) explains, when these routinised practices come from ordinary people (in this case, shopkeepers and their clients) they can be conflict

calming, as everyday coexistence, interaction, and tolerance can provide enough social glue to move societies towards peace formation.

In the current context, the two local authorities are separately responsible for regulating signage on streets and businesses in Cyprus. While prior to 2003, the division of the physical space meant that there was no urgent need to develop or review public policies around public signage, the opening of the crossing-points entailed social and economic changes, which highlighted the need to consider language use. Our interviews with the shopkeepers showed that public policies for guiding, regulating and/or encouraging multilingualism in Greek and Turkish were missing. Such policies could promote reconciliatory efforts. Hence, one of the most important implications of our study would be to highlight the need for policies and/or regulations in relation to multilingualism to be produced by the two local authorities. This suggestion is based on our results which show that the motivations of using or not using specific languages in the area are driven by not only economic but also ideological and political factors. Yet, we are also aware that due to the challenges posed by the current division, such policies will need to be grounded in further research, which would not only focus on the LL and its producers but also other stakeholders such as community members and potential customers.

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