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*Chapter 8*

Language and Language Ideologies among Turkish-Speaking Young People in Athens and London

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There is a growing body of research on language and the social values associated with minority and majority languages among Turkish-speaking, mainly second and third generation, young people in homes, schools and communities in Europe (see Özcan, Madsen, Keçik and Jørgensen, this volume). Jørgensen (2008, 2010), Møller (2008, 2009) and Møller and Jørgensen (2011) investigated the polylingual languaging practices of Turkish-Danish youth in instructional and recreational school settings. They showed how young people deployed linguistic resources from different languages and drew on the evaluative relationship between majority and minority languages in ways that reproduced but also contested norms of appropriate language use in school settings. Keim (2008) examined the language-mixing practices of a group of young women of Turkish origin in Mannheim, Germany. She illustrated how they iconically linked German and Turkish vernaculars to social categories located in the Turkish-speaking immigrant worlds of their parents’ generation and the local German-speaking majority from which they sought to distance themselves. Lytra and Baraç (2008) and Blackledge and Creese (2010) showed how Turkish-speaking young people used their multilingual resources to respond to two seemingly contradictory positions in the ideology and practice of Turkish complementary schools in London, where mainly British-born children learn the community language, culture and history. On the one hand, these young people kept languages separate and focused on standard Turkish language use; on the other hand, they combined linguistic resources from standard Turkish and English and vernaculars, such as regional, youth-oriented and social-class based varieties of Turkish and English (see Creese and Blackledge, this volume).

This chapter aims to extend this line of research by investigating Turkish-speaking young people’s sets of beliefs about standard and vernaculars of Turkish in two different Turkish-speaking communities and instructional settings, namely two complementary schools in London and a primary state school in Athens. The community in Athens is part of an indigenous minority that originally resided in the north of Greece. This community has been established as a result of ongoing processes of urbanization within Greece, and is comprised of Turkish-speaking Roma. The Turkish-speaking communities in the UK emerged as part of transnational migration flows that brought together Turkish-speaking Cypriot Turks, Turks and Kurds from Turkey, as well as Turkish-speaking people who moved to the UK from other EU countries.[[2]](#footnote-2) By comparing the two communities, I seek to explore the ways in which their compositions and their members’ migration trajectories shaped the young people’s sets of beliefs about standard and vernaculars of Turkish, as well as their personal and collective identities in Athens and London. Moreover, the comparison of the two communities can shed light on the restrictions and affordances of the institutional settings described in the young people’s sets of beliefs.

First, I briefly describe the institutional settings where the production of standard Turkish and its vernaculars occurred. Using field notes, interviews and interactional data, I address the following two questions: what are the young people’s beliefs about standard Turkish and its vernaculars in Athens and London, and in what ways are these beliefs negotiated, reproduced and contested across different school contexts and participant configurations in the two settings? Language ideologies seen as ‘sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use’ (Silverstein 1979 reported in Kroskrity 1998: 104) provide a useful analytical frame to investigate these questions. As Kroskrity (ibid: 104) eloquently argues, ‘a focus on language ideologies directs attention to cultural actors’ rationalization of their own language activity’. In this sense, it brings together the young people’s perspectives and the social processes that shape them. In particular, I draw on the three semiotic processes of language ideology described by Irvine and Gal (2000), namely *iconization*, *fractal recursivity* and *erasure*, and Agha’s (2003, 2007) notion of *enregisterment* to shed light on ‘the multiplicity of language ideologies and their association with contestation’ (Kroskrity 1998: 118). I illustrate how young people in the two communities on the one hand accept and reproduce the prestige of standard Turkish, albeit in different ways**,** and on the other hand contest it. Underlying their contestations is the ascription of positive social values to the vernaculars they use in their daily interactions with family and friends at home and in their respective communities. Crucially, the young people’s beliefs about languages reveal unequal competences and differential access to the standard between and within the two institutional settings and communities. It also highlights that the social values attached to standard and vernaculars are neither constant nor remain unchallenged.

**Language Ideologies and Processes of Enregisterment**

Research on language ideologies focuses on the study of metalanguage. However, ideologies of language are not only about language. Rather, as Woolard (1998: 3) argues, language ideologies:

[…] envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology. Through such linkages, they underpin not only linguistic form and use but also the very notion of the person and the social group, as well as such fundamental social institutions as religious ritual, child socialization, gender relations, the nation-state, schooling, and law.

In linking the linguistic and the social, language ideologies can be seen as ‘the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests’ (Irvine 1998: 255). This implies that language ideologies can never be taken as ‘natural’, ‘transparent’ or ‘neutral’, but need to be understood and investigated as cultural constructions. Moreover, language ideologies may be widely shared within a given community as well as expressed by a small elite. They may produce uniform as well as contentious discourses that reflect struggles within communities and contradictions within individuals. As such, language ideologies are an important aspect of what Silverstein (1985: 220) has aptly referred to as ‘the total linguistic fact’: ‘the unstable mutual interaction of meaningful sign forms contextualized to situations of interested human use, mediated by the fact of cultural ideology’. I present below important dimensions of language ideology that inform my analysis.

The notion that language indexes peoplehood, or, put differently, that language is the most authentic indicator of national identity and allegiance, is fundamental in understanding how social actors’ language ideologies concerning boundaries and difference shape language use. The identification of the use of Turkish with the Turkish people was a crucial component of the process of constructing the modern Turkish state. It sought to break away from the Ottoman and Islamic past and the use of *Osmanlıca* (‘Ottoman Turkish’), which was saturated by Turkish, Arabic and Persian vocabulary and grammatical structures and had developed into the administrative and literary language of the Ottoman Empire, but which ordinary people did not use in their everyday speech. Underlying the equation of language and nation are ideas about what counts as a language, and assumptions that languages are separate and enumerable categories. Moreover, it invokes hierarchies or rankings of languages and values associated with languages, standards and vernaculars (*cf.* Blackledge and Creese 2010; Heller 2007; Makoni and Pennycook 2007).

To investigate the sets of values young people ascribe to standard Turkish and its vernaculars in Athens and London, my analysis draws on the three semiotic processes of language ideology postulated by Irvine and Gal (2000). The first process, *iconization,*

[…] involves a transformation of the sign relationship between linguistic features (or varieties) and the social images with which they are linked. Linguistic features that index social groups or activities appear to be iconic representations of them as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group’s inherent nature or essence (Irvine and Gal 2000: 37).

The second process, *fractal recursivity*, ‘involves the projection of an opposition, salient at some level of the relationship, onto some other level. For example, intra-group oppositions might be projected outward onto inter-group relations, and vice-versa’ (*ibid*: 38). The third process, *erasure*, ‘is the process in which ideology […] renders some persons or activities (or sociolinguistic phenomena) invisible. Facts that are inconsistent with the ideological scheme either go unnoticed or get explained away’ (*ibid*: 38). In focusing on these semiotic processes, I investigate the ideas that frame Turkish-speaking young people’s understandings of linguistic difference between standard and vernaculars in Athens and London. What do their representations iconically stand for? Once established, how are they are applied to other relationships? What is being omitted from these representations?

Agha (2003: 231) defines *enregisterment* as ‘processes through which a linguistic repertoire becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register of forms’ (see also Agha 2007). Agha (2003) links the emergence of a linguistic repertoire to a ‘series of social processes – processes of value production, maintenance and transformation’. He goes on to argue that

[…] cultural value is not a static property of things or people but a precipitate of sociohistorically locatable practices, including discursive practices, which imbue cultural forms with recognizable sign-values and bring these values into circulation along identifiable trajectories in social spaces (Agha 2003: 232).

Standard Turkish was the product of the *dil devrimi* (‘language reform’), which was introduced with the purpose of eliminating the gap between the language of the elites and the language of the people, and reinforcing a modern ‘westernized’ Turkish identity. It was introduced alongside the *harf devrim* (‘alphabet reform’), which saw the replacement of Ottoman script with a modified Roman alphabet, to make the written code more accessible to the people. The aim of the language reform was to replace Ottoman with *Öztürkçe* (‘pure/our Turkish’) (Lewis 1999: 49).

The language reform was heavily supported by Kemal Atatürk, the founding father of the Republic of Turkey, as well as by intellectuals and by journalists. Agha (2003) discusses the role of heads of state and mass media personalities as ‘exemplary speakers’ in shaping the language choices of language users. He claims that the spreading of a register is mediated through ‘processes of role alignment’, arguing that

[…] any social person who is a receiver of such a message can, in principle, seek to align his or her own self-image with the characterological figures depicted in the message, wishing to transform one’s own speech in favor of models depicted (Agha 2003: 243).

Moreover, language users come to recognize that cultural values attached to particular registers are linked to attributes of speakers. In other words, they ‘anchor speech repertoires to named positions in social space’ (Agha 2003: 236). Furthermore, the terms used to refer to particular registers are not neutral descriptors, but rather part of a wider range of metadiscursive practices that connect speech to social images of persons. The social consequences of this transformation depend on the circulation of ‘metadiscursive standards’ that are available to language users as evaluative criteria (Agha 2003: 252). Since the early years of the language reform, standard Turkish has been represented by the Kemalist elite and intelligentsia as a form of socioeconomic and symbolic capital. Its use is associated with social status, education, economic mobility, and most importantly with Turkish national identity and a western orientation. At the same time, vernaculars, especially at the level of lexis and accents, continue to be very much in use throughout Turkey. Regardless of the increasing visibility of vernaculars in the media and public discourse in recent years, standard users continue to be represented in institutional and non-institutional contexts as more ‘educated’ and ‘urbane’ than vernacular users. Nevertheless, as Agha (2003) cautions, evaluative criteria concerning languages do not circulate in the same way within and across communities, nor, as I also seek to illustrate in this chapter, are the cultural values attached to standards and vernaculars constant or remain unchallenged.

**Data, Participants and Methods**

For the purposes of this chapter, I use sets of data from two research projects I conducted with Turkish-speaking youth. In my engagement with the two projects, I drew on different roles, ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ positions and perspectives. The first project was a sociolinguistic study of majority Greek and minority Turkish-speaking children’s talk-in-interaction at a linguistically, culturally and ethnically diverse stateprimary school in Athens. I learned of the school through my two-year involvement as volunteer tutor at a community-based homework club for Turkish-speaking youth in the neighbourhood. My teaching and pastoral roles there provided a point of entry into the school. The bulk of my fieldwork in the school consisted of focused ethnographic observations and tape recordings of the Year 4 pupil cohort (ten-year-olds) across school settings, which were carried out between January 1999 and May 1999 and on subsequent one-day school visits between September 1999 and June 2001. My analysis of the interactional data benefited from semi-structured qualitative interviews and informal discussions with teachers, majority and minority children and parents, as well as from other written and visual sources. Moreover, I further contextualized my analysis by means of periodic visits to children’s homes from 1996 until 2005, and to the local after-school non-profit organization *Δρόμοι Ζωής* (‘Paths of Life’) many children attended daily from 2001 onwards (Lytra 2007).

The second project consisted of an ethnographically-informed study of children’s multilingual practices and identity negotiations in two Turkish complementary schools in London that took place between March 2006 and November 2007.[[3]](#footnote-3) I gained access to the two schools through personal and professional contact with members of the schools’ managing committees. I collaborated closely with two researchers who were bilingual in English and Turkish and who were members of the Turkish-speaking communities in London. During an intense twelve-week period (May to July 2006), we collected linguistic data in a range of school settings, including classrooms, break-times, assemblies and other school contexts. We conducted participant observations and audio- and video-recordings in the classroom, during assemblies, break-times and at important school events, and conducted interviews with the young people, their parents and teachers and members of the schools’ managing committees, and collected photographs and documentary data relating to the schools’ policies, planning and curricula.

**Turkish-speaking Communities in Athens and London**

The two Turkish-speaking communities in Athens and London under study are radically different in terms of their migration histories as well as their linguistic, educational, religious and socio-economic make-up. It is important to acknowledge the immense diversity, not only between the two communities, but equally within them. In this sense, for lack of a better term, the social category ‘community’ is not used to imply a homogeneous entity but a rather diverse grouping of people. In this section, I seek to briefly sketch the two communities’ histories and make-ups.

The members of the Turkish-speaking community in Athens live in a socio-economically depressed neighbourhood in the city centre. Historically, they belong to the ‘Muslim minority of Western Thrace’ as it is officially called (Western Thrace is a prefecture in the north east of Greece). This is regarded as an indigenous religious minority whose origins can be traced back to the Ottoman conquest (1354-1715) (Asimakopoulou and Christidou-Lionaraki 2002: 214-215). Its legal status and linguistic, cultural, educational and religious rights are protected by the Lausanne Treaty signed by Greece and Turkey in 1923. The ‘Muslim minority of Western Thrace’ consists of ethnic Turks as well as Muslims of Pomak and Roma descent, some of whom are Turkish-speaking and others Romani-speaking. Economic migration from Western Thrace to Athens in the 1970s early 1980s led to the establishment of a Turkish-speaking minority community of Roma heritage in the Athens neighbourhood where I conducted fieldwork. Community members have limited educational and vocational qualifications, many receive state benefits and very few run local businesses. At the time of the fieldwork, the community was estimated to consist of approximately 2,500-3,000 residents.

Turkish-speaking communities in the UK developed as part of transnational migration flows. They bring together four broad groups with distinct migration histories: Turkish-speaking Cypriot Turks, Turks and Kurds from Turkey and Turkish-speaking people who have experienced secondary migration from other EU countries. Unofficial estimates indicate that the number of Turkish-speaking peoples living mainly in the Greater London area is approximately 180,000-200,000 (Mehmet Ali 2001). Migration from Cyprus was due to economic reasons and as a result of continual intercommunal violence on the island, especially during the 1950s and early 1960s. Post-1974 migration took place in the aftermath of the Turkish invasion and the division of the island, while the 2004 EU ascension of the Republic of Cyprus resulted in further Cypriot-Turkish migration. Turkish mainland migration to the UK started in the mid 1970s and 1980s, and was part of wider migration patterns from mainland Turkey to western Europe. Turkish-speaking Kurds from Turkey moved to the UK for political and economic reasons from the 1980s onwards. Many sought political asylum as a result of ongoing warfare in south east Turkey. More recently, Turkish-speaking people from other EU countries have also moved to the UK. Although largely working class and lower middle class, the younger British-born generation is increasingly accessing higher education and the professions.

**The Institutional Settings**

The institutional settings described in this chapter are different in several important ways. The setting in Athens is a multilingual, multicultural, multiethnic state primary school. Nearly half of the pupil population is comprised of Turkish-speaking minority and immigrant children; other state schools in the area have lower numbers of minority and immigrant children. In 1996 the school was granted the status of ‘intercultural school’ due to its diverse pupil population. The aim of this new policy initiative was to promote a culturally-responsive pedagogy and practice that acknowledges the significance of the pupils’ funds of knowledge for language and literacy teaching and learning (Androussou 1996: 11). As I have discussed elsewhere (Lytra 2007), a common critique of such policy initiatives is that although they were designed to combat discrimination and provide equal opportunities for all, in practice they do not challenge structural inequalities. The dissonance between educational rhetoric and practice is best exemplified by the fact that although there is legislative provision for the teaching of the children’s community and immigrant languages in state schools, this has not come into effect. Informal efforts by teachers in the school in question to start an after-school standard Turkish language and literacy club open to all children received limited support by some minority and majority parents, while many majority parents spoke vociferously against it. As a result, the initiative was swiftly abandoned. One could argue that the parents’ responses to the proposed Turkish language and literacy club reflect the complex position of Turkish in Greece, embedded in the historical and political antagonism between Greece and Turkey. For Greeks, the Turks emerge as the most significant ‘others’. The different constructions of ‘Turks’ and by extension of ‘Turkish’ in the Greek national imagination are frequently based on negative representations and stereotypes, as Millas (2001), Theodosopoulos (2007) and Lytra (2014) among others have shown.

The setting in London consists of two Turkish complementary schools, ‘East London’ Turkish School and ‘West London’ Turkish School (both are pseudonyms). Complementary schools, also known as community or heritage schools, are set up by linguistic, cultural or religious communities to transmit the community language, culture and history to mainly British-born children. They tend to operate in the margins of educational provision, on weekends or during after-school hours, and they are embedded in powerful language ideologies that are often hostile to societal multilingualism and educational bilingualism. ‘East London’ Turkish School is located in an area with a long-established Turkish-Cypriot presence. Children of Turkish-Cypriot heritage constitute the majority of the population, although there are some Turkish-speaking families from mainland Turkey as well as families where only one parent is Turkish-speaking. ‘West London’ Turkish School is situated in a part of London that is not considered to be one of the traditional areas of concentration of Turkish-speaking peoples. The majority of the families come from mainland Turkey, and in nearly half of them only one parent is Turkish-speaking.[[4]](#footnote-4) Both schools were founded in the late 1980s, have between 110 and 250 children and run on weekends (Creese *et al.* 2008).

**Constructing Linguistic Differentiation**

Turkish-speaking young people in Athens and London reported speaking ‘*Τούρκικa*’, ‘*Türkçe*’or‘Turkish’. The use of these linguistic labels was deployed to encompass both the standard and its vernaculars. Nevertheless, the linguistic repertoires and language usage of Turkish-speaking youth was more complex. Participant observations revealed that Turkish-speaking young people in London had different degrees of access to and competence in standard Turkish, depending on migration trajectories as well as home language and literacy practices, attitudes and values. Vernaculars include Turkish-Cypriot, which differs from the standard in vocabulary, syntax, morphology and phonology due to long-term contact with Greek-Cypriot and more recently with English (Issa 2005). Migration to the UK from mainland Turkey and other EU countries brought to London a variety of other vernaculars, which tend to have minor differences from the standard at the level of phonology and vocabulary. Moreover, extensive mixing of standard, vernaculars and English resulted in the development of a London vernacular *Londralı* (‘Londoner’) Turkish (Issa 2005: 16). Turkish vernaculars traditionally enjoy symbolic and socio-economic value in intra-community relations and communication in institutional and non-institutional settings (Issa 2005). Standard Turkish is highly valued as the language of education, or as the ‘correct’ form of Turkish among the members of the Turkish-speaking communities (ibid). In complementary schools in particular, parents and teachers routinely referred to standard Turkish as *temiz Türkçe* (‘clean/proper Turkish’) (Lytra and Baraç 2008, Lytra 2012). At the same time, for many young people, standard Turkish is part of their everyday language use. Young people not only come to recognize it as the prestige register but also often use it alongside vernaculars at home, in the community or when they visit their families’ places of origin in Turkey and Cyprus – countries many families visit annually, and with which they retain strong transnational ties.

Recent research on young peoples’ speech in institutional settings demonstrated that Turkish complementary schools in London were key vehicles for the promotion of standard Turkish (Creese, Lytra, Baraç, and Yağcıoğlu-Ali 2007, Lytra and Baraç 2008, 2009, Lytra 2011, 2012, 2013). Classroom observations documented the fact that the focus of language and literacy teaching and learning was in the standard. During lessons, the processes of *iconization* operating in tandem with *fractal recursivity* and *erasure* were evident when teachers as ‘exemplary speakers’ of the standard (Agha 2003: 265) policed linguistic boundaries. The policing of linguistic boundaries took the form of overtly correcting regional accents, discouraging the use of Cypriot-Turkish vocabulary, language mixing and code-switching to English. In the excerpt below, a pupil is reading aloud the story she wrote based on a series of pictures.

**Excerpt 1:**

1 Pupil 1: Bir kiz shoplara gidiyordu annessine hediye <A girl was going

2 to the shops [to buy] a present for her mother>

3 Teacher: shop??!!

<Pupils laugh>

4 Pupil 1: kiz mağazaya gidiyordu annesine hediye alaçaktın anneler günü

5 için. Giyisiye bakıyourdu ama annesine uygun birşey bulamadi

6 … <The girl was going to a shop to buy her mother a present

7 for Mother’s Day. She was looking for a dress but she

8 couldn’t find anything for her mother>

The pupil has incorporated the Turkish plural suffix [lar] and the dative suffix [a] to the English lexical item ‘shop’; both grammatical suffixes follow the rules of vowel harmony in Turkey for the derivation of suffixes following back vowels [a], [ı], [o], [u]. The teacher’s vocal response, however, indicates that such instances of language mixing are treated as ‘incorrect’ language use. His response reflects one of the positions in the ideology and practice in Turkish complementary school classrooms, where languages are to be kept apart and ‘uncontaminated’ from traces of other linguistic resources. It also reinforces the iconic relationship between standard Turkish and *temiz Türkçe* (‘clean/proper Turkish’). Furthermore, in his language ideological work, the teacher invokes the recursive application of the native/foreign distinction, despite the pervasiveness of English elements in the young people’s everyday speech in Turkish. The pupil self-corrects and repeats the sentence using the 'correct' word ‘*mağaza*’ (‘shop’), which is perceived as less ‘foreign’.

The following field notes illustrate how young people themselves reproduce linguistic differentiation. They show how pupils may censure their speech by avoiding the use of Turkish-Cypriot when they do not know the equivalent word in the standard. Note that most children in this GCSE[[5]](#footnote-5) class are of Turkish-Cypriot heritage, as is their teacher, Adem Bey (all names used are pseudonyms):

**Excerpt 2:**

The pupils are quietly working on the assigned task. As they are jotting down their answers in their notebooks, I hear one girl asking Adem Bey for a pen. Instead of saying that she wants a pen, she uses gestures, mimicking the act of writing. The teacher responds in the following way: *‘Biz buna ‘tükenmez’ deriz. Aferin bakın Selma. Size her zaman söylediğimi uyguluyor. Türkçe konuşalım diyorum ya ‘penna’ dememek için bana işaret etti’* (‘We call this [showing a pen] *tükenmez*. Well done Selma. You did what I always tell you to do. You know I tell you to speak Turkish all the time and Selma, taking my advice, used gestures to show me what she wanted instead of saying *penna* [‘pen’ in Cypriot-Turkish]’). There is no reaction from the pupils, and the teacher begins the reading comprehension questions with the entire class (Field notes, 29/04/2006).

As the field notes indicate, Selma chooses the gestural mode over the verbal mode in order to avoid using the Turkish-Cypriot word *penna* (‘pen’) when she addresses her teacher. By making the gesture of writing instead of uttering the word *penna*, she appears to be treating the use of the Turkish-Cypriot word as accented or deviant for teacher-pupil verbal interaction during the lesson. Indeed, the teacher’s evaluation of her use of the gestural mode echoes the positive images of personhood linked to the use of the standard. As emphasized above, standard users tend to be iconically represented as more ‘educated’ and ‘urbane’ than vernacular users.

In the London Turkish complementary school context in particular, these representations are further reinforced by an institutional discourse about the economic value of standard Turkish for the younger, mainly British-born, Turkish-speaking youth. Proficiency in the standard is linked to academic success in mainstream education, the attainment of language qualifications in Turkish, which is recognized as a standard entry qualification for studying at university in England, and access to tertiary education and the professions (Creese *et al*. 2008, Lytra 2013; see also Francis *et al*. 2009, 2010 for similar discourses in Chinese complementary schools). The commodifying effect on language that this institutional discourse has accentuates the divisions between standard and vernaculars as the ‘correct/incorrect’ code, particularly, as in the case of Selma, when preparing for GSCE language exams.

Linguistic differentiation between standard and vernaculars also draws on two salient oppositions widely in operation in mainstream Turkish society and the Turkish-speaking diaspora in London: ‘more educated/less educated’ and ‘urbane/provincial’. Irvine and Gal (2000: 39) argue that a focus on linguistic differentiation draws attention to ‘processes of identity formation that depend on defining the self as against some imagined ‘other’’. By following what the teacher ‘always tells them to do’, Selma aligns herself with all the positive attributes that standard speakers of Turkish enjoy. At the same time, she presents herself as a language learner who understands and appreciates the value of ‘correct’ Turkish, not least because achieving a high grade in the standard Turkish language ‘paves the way to University’ (*Haber* newspaper 2010). The complementary schools’ emphasis on the standard reinforces the iconic association between users of standard Turkish and educational and future professional success for Turkish-speaking young people. The institutional recognition and authority of standard Turkish, however, erases the complexity and heterogeneity of the pupils’ colloquial speech and renders Turkish vernaculars invisible during Turkish language and literacy teaching and learning.

The Turkish vernacular that young people speak in Athens is derived from a regional variety referred to in the linguistics literature as ‘Thracian Turkish’ or ‘West Thracian Turkish’. It is characterized by morphological simplification, especially in the verb and noun formation, and phonological differences vis-à-vis the standard, as well as by the use of loan words from Greek (Sella-Mazi 1993). Participant observations in children’s homes and the local community revealed that the vernacular was routinely used in everyday communication at home and at work. Young people mainly had access to standard Turkish via Turkish satellite TV and other cultural products and home literacy, although on a limited scale. In interviews and informal discussions, young people in Athens referred to the standard as *kibar Türkçe* or simply *kibarca* (‘polite/refined Turkish’). They iconically associated standard Turkish with ‘educated’ people and with an ‘imagined’ community in Anderson’s sense (1991) of standard language users in Turkey – a country most of them have never visited and have only come to know through TV and other media representations and family narratives. Unlike many Turkish-speaking youth in London, although they recognized the standard as the prestige code, they rarely used it.

Classroom observations in the state primary school in Athens illustrated that most teachers were committed in principle to developing a culturally-responsive curriculum and putting it into classroom practice. I observed that pupils felt comfortable bringing their funds of knowledge into the classroom space in the context of specific literacy activities. For instance, during the lesson, children shared information with their teachers and classmates about favourite soap operas and noteworthy new items they had watched on Turkish satellite TV. Teachers tended to respond to these contributions positively, albeit briefly, making, where possible, implicit rather than explicit links between the children’s home languages and cultures and the curriculum. None of the teachers were Turkish speakers, nor did they speak any other of the children’s community languages, although some had basic knowledge of Turkish grammar and phonology. Moreover, most teachers reported being aware that the children and their families spoke a Turkish vernacular at home and in the community that was not the standard. However, teachers were unable to differentiate between standard and vernacular. The following field notes describe an occasion when a pupil brought a Turkish primer to school.

**Excerpt 3:**

Every Monday morning during literacy hour the children can bring items from home to share with their classmates. Today, Tuncay, a Turkish-speaking boy, brought a tattered Turkish language primer. It’s a small book with black and white pictures, which teaches young children how to read. The book was printed in the 1970s in Turkey. Tuncay explains that his uncle (a qualified Turkish-language primary school teacher) gave it to him and that his mother is teaching him how to read. Miss Soula, the teacher, comments that it’s important to learn to read in Turkish just as it is to learn to read in Greek and English. Fanis, another Turkish-speaking child, adds that it’s useful because then the children can find the meaning of Turkish words in the (Greek-Turkish bilingual) dictionary. I’ve noticed that looking up words in the bilingual dictionary is a literacy practice the teacher seems to encourage (Field notes, 15/03/1999).

Tuncay’s initiative to bring the Turkish primer to school and the teacher and pupil responses to it reveal the low-key visibility of standard Turkish for specific classroom literacy activities, such as sharing items from home and learning to use a bilingual dictionary. In this context, the class teacher represents developing literacy in Turkish as a valued resource, which she evaluates in a positive way, similar to language and literacy learning in other languages, notably Greek (the school’s medium of instruction) and English (the foreign language taught at school). One could argue that the teacher’s response attempts to neutralize dominant societal discourses that tend to ascribe different values to different languages. At the same time, this understanding of language as value-free seems to gloss over linguistic inequalities that normalize the dominance of the national standard and foreign languages, and marginalize community languages. Indeed, recent research has shown that children and their families often choose not to maintain community languages, because they fear it will undermine Greek language learning and subsequent successful integration in Greek society (Sidiropoulou 2003).

The next excerpt also took place during literacy hour. The pupils and the teacher have read a story about a child going to a village school at the turn of the twentieth century. In the ensuing discussion, the teacher describes the changes the Greek education system underwent throughout the twentieth century and gives the example of how the accent marks changed. She explains that prior to 1982, there were five different marks to indicate stress, with different rules for placing them. The teacher writes the different marks on the blackboard, at which point Bahrye, a Turkish-speaking pupil, introduces a comparison between one of the accent marks (which looks like a tilde [˜] and is called *περιστωμένη* ‘perispomeni’) and the Turkish letter *yumuşak ge* [ğ] (which has a similar mark on top of the letter [g]). The excerpt features the English translation only.

**Excerpt 4**

((Bahiye and Meltem: minority Turkish-speaking children, Giannis, Vasia, Costas and their teacher, Miss Soula: majority Greek))

1 Miss Soula we said there were many accent marks=

2 Vasia =this one [here

3 ((she writes the accent mark ‘perispomeni’ with her finger

4 in the air))

5 Costas [‘perispomeni’ ((the accent mark Vasia is

6 referring to))

7 Miss Soula ‘perispomeni’ and those ((other accent marks))

8 that were used with words=

9 Meltem =were these accent marks?=

10 Giannis =Miss which [letter do you use with this accent mark or

11 Meltem [oh my gosh

12 Giannis the one you’re referring to?=

13 Vasia yes Miss you showed us these accent marks

14 Miss Soula ((to Giannis)) where it talks about accent marks

15 ((in the book)) it means this one

16 Giannis the( … )

17 Miss Soula yes=

🡪 18 Bahriye =Miss in Turkish there [is a letter like this

19 ((Bahrye gets up and walks to the blackboard))

20 Ms Soula [((to Giannis)) that’s

21 what ((the writer of the story)) means here

🡪 22 Bahriye ((she writes the letter [g] on the blackboard)) and

23 you put this ((a similar looking mark to the Greek accent mark

24 ‘peristomeni’ on top of the letter [g])) Miss ..

25 Miss Soula ((to Bahrye)) yes like that [yes

🡪 26 Bahriye [it’s called *yumuşak ge*

27 Miss Soula only in Turkish this letter always takes this

28 ((mark)) . [right?

29 Meltem [is there such a letter ((in Turkish))?=

30 Miss Soula =what I’m telling you is a lot harder ((to learn))

31 because . for example in ((the vowels)) ‘omega’

32 and ‘itta’ you could have this accent mark ((she writes

33 on the blackboard)) or that accent mark ..

Bahriye’s metalinguistic comment shows her awareness of the written codes of Greek and Turkish and her ability to talk about them. Her ability to compare the written codes is in itself very interesting since she did not have any formal literacy in Turkish. She reported that her mother had taught her the Turkish alphabet and that she had developed her reading skills primarily by reading the subtitles on Turkish satellite TV. It is worth contrasting Bahriye’s developing knowledge of the standard with that of Meltem’s: when Bahriye writes the letter *yumuşak ge* [ğ] on the blackboard, Meltem inquires whether there is indeed such a letter in Turkish, revealing the asymmetries of access and competence in the written standard between the two Turkish-speaking girls (line 29).

Both excerpts illustrate that while Turkish-speaking children in Athens have limited formal literacy in the standard, they draw upon it strategically for specific classroom literacy activities (e.g. comparing Greek and Turkish words, using a bilingual dictionary). Its strategic use allows for the low-key visibility of aspects of standard Turkish on the main classroom floor, as the teacher seems to accept Turkish as one of the ‘correct’ and ‘appropriate’ codes for these classroom literacy activities. Indeed, Miss Soula responds briefly to the children’s contributions and does not seem to encourage futher uptakes, which perhaps reflects her own limited knowledge of Turkish. The low-key visibility of Turkish does, however, allow pupils such as Tuncay and Bahrye to demonstrate their linguistic repertoires and present themselves as ‘competent’ language users of a valued linguistic resource for specific literacy activities.

One could argue that while these exchanges are in keeping with the school’s intercultural rhetoric, they challenge in a very limited way entrenched language ideologies in Greek state schools. Greek, the national language and medium of instruction, is imbued with symbolic power and educational and socio-economic capital. English, perceived as the most prestigious foreign language, is represented as a valued resource, which is closely linked with the attainment of language qualifications and future professional success. Community and immigrant languages, however, are represented as a hinderance to language learning and social integration. In this language ideological context, Turkish is negatively positioned as both a community language and as the language of the significant ‘Other’.

Linguistic differentiation in Greek state schools operates between on the one hand Greek and the prestigious foreign languages (e.g. English, French, German), and on the other hand community and immigrant languages. Vernaculars do not seem to play any role in this relationship, not least because the overwhelming majority of teachers do not know their pupils’ community languages and would not be able to diffentiate between standard and vernaculars. In this respect, the salient opposition between standard Turkish and regional vernaculars of Turkish documented in Turkish complementary schools does not emerge in the Greek primary school in question. In other words, unlike Turkish complementary schools, the invisibility of the young people’s vernacular was not part of the teachers’ deliberate efforts to police linguistic boundaries. Rather, it appears to be the product of teachers’ limited awareness of their pupils’ verncacular and knowledge of the standard.

**Voicing Contestation**

Both the Turkish complementary schools in London and the mainstream primary school in Athens provided various discursive spaces and opportunities for reproducing and legitimizing the standard. While children recognized the importance of the standard and the positive images associated with its users, it is important to acknowledge that the social value of the standard was not constant, nor did it always go unchallenged. The following field notes illustrate how children may contest teachers’ attempts to ‘correct’ their regional accents during Turkish literacy teaching in London.

**Excerpt 5:**

Artun Bey writes the answer to question two on the board: *‘Elma, armut, portakal gibi meyveler ile ıspanak, lahana, domates ve salatalık gibi sebzeler var’* (‘There are fruits like apples, pears, oranges and vegetables such as spinach, cabbages, tomatoes and cucumber’). When Artun Bey asks the class to identify the fruit pictured in the market stalls in their textbook, Yildiz and Berna shout out *‘ıspanak, salatalık’* (‘spinach, cucumber’) He queries their suggestions: *‘Bunlar meyve mi? Onlar sebze’* (‘Are these fruit? These are vegetables’). They then discuss the pronunciation of the word *‘sebze’* (‘vegetables’). Some of the children, including Berna, have been pronouncing *‘sebze’* as *‘zebze’* and Artun Bey corrects them. Berna is not happy being corrected. She insists that the correct pronunciation is *‘zebze’*, arguing that that’s the way her mother pronounces the word. Artun Bey has this to say: *‘Annelerimiz öyle diyor ama doğrusu sebze’* (‘our mothers may say it that way but the right way is *sebze*’) (Field notes, 18/06/2006).

Artun Bey’s prescriptivist comment regarding the pronunciation of the word *sebze* (‘vegetable’) draws on the authority of the standard as the only ‘correct’ code. Through the process of erasure, the internal phonological variation of Turkish is disregarded. In her response, Berna invokes another authority, her mother, and claims that this is the way she pronounces the perceived ‘mispronounced’ word. Indeed, the transformation of word initial [s] into [z] is a common feature of many vernaculars of Turkish. Although Artun Bey seems to recognize this variation in vernacular Turkish by acknowledging that *annelerimiz* (‘our mothers’ - here he includes his mother as well) may pronounce it that way, he still insists that there is a single ‘right’ pronunciation.

The teacher’s insistence on ‘correct’ language use also evokes essentialized representations. As Irvine and Gal (2000: 39) argue, ‘the imagery involved in this essentializing process includes […] linguistic images – images in which the linguistic behaviors of others are simplified and seen deriving from those persons’ essences’. Speakers with regional accents, especially from the southeast of Turkey, are *iconically* represented in the Turkish media as ‘backward’, ‘uncouth’ and ‘provincial’. Media representations exploit the speakers’ accents and other modalities, such as gesture, dress, posture and gait, to conjure up these images of personhood. As discussed, these representations of vernacular speakers draw on the salient opposition of ‘urbane/provincial’ in mainstream Turkish society, to which young people in the Turkish diasporas in London also seem to orient (*cf.* Lytra and Baraç 2009). In this context, by contesting the teacher’s ‘correct’ speech, Berna seems to be resisting prescriptivist norms of language use and perhaps challenging the link between speakers of regional accents and particular types of persons. Moreover, by anchoring her language use to that of her mother, she treats Artun Bey’s correction as problematic, and attempts to reconstitute the internal phonological variation of Turkish as the norm.

The next excerpt shows that while children may acknowledge the prestige of the standard, they may also question commonly-held positive speaker attributes linked to its use. The interview excerpt is taken from a discussion I had with a group of minority Turkish-speaking children on language use, which took place at the end of the school day in Athens. It focuses on their usage and attitudes to standard, ‘polite’ Turkish, and to the vernacular. The excerpt includes the English translation only.

**Excerpt 6**

1 Vally is the Turkish on TV the same as the Turkish you speak with

2 your mum?

3 Fanis no that ((on TV)) is ‘polite’ Turkish

4 Tuncay ((laughs)) ‘polite’ Turkish

5 Vally would you like to learn how to speak ‘polite’ Turkish

6 Tuncay no

7 Vally ((to Tuncay)) why not?

8 Fanis I want to say can I say why I want ((to learn to speak ‘polite’

9 Turkish))?

10 Vally go ahead

11 Fanis when some relative comes from Turkey I need to be able to

12 speak ‘polite’ Turkish

13 Vally ((to Bahrye)) would you like to learn how to speak ‘polite’

14 Turkish or are you happy with the way you speak now?

15 Bahriye look Miss people who learn ‘polite’ Turkish they do it to show

16 off ((also)) some speak it because they are from Turkey

17 Vally would you like to speak it?

Bahriye I’m happy speaking what I speak

For Fanis being able to speak ‘polite’ Turkish is represented as a resource with instrumental and symbolic value. It facilitates effective communication with relatives from Turkey who may not be familiar with the vernacular he speaks. The representation of the standard as the common language that connects Turkish speakers across countries is a recurring theme in minority discourses in Athens and in Western Thrace as well (Lytra 2007). At the same time, Fanis draws on shared ideological representations that depict speakers of ‘polite’ Turkish as having positive attributes (‘being educated and having good manners’). By confirming his desire to learn to speak ‘polite’ Turkish, Fanis seems to be aspiring to the positive identity attributes associated with standard Turkish speakers. Bahriye, however, puts forth an alternative reading: she iconically associates speakers of ‘polite’ Turkish in her community in Athens with community members who ‘show off’ and want to present themselves as better than the rest. Although she acknowledges that people from Turkey may also speak ‘polite’ Turkish, her loyalty to the local Turkish vernacular defines the self as someone who does not ‘show off’, in opposition to those who do. In her language ideological work, she maps the opposition of ‘our language/their language’ onto the local vernacular spoken in Athens and the standard.

**Language Ideologies in Athens and London: Some Implications**

In this chapter, I illustrated the web of language ideologies, cultural oppositions and boundaries in operation in the two Turkish-speaking communities and institutional settings in Athens and London, respectively. The semiotic processes of *iconization*, *fractal recursivity* and *erasure* allowed us to explore the perspectives of the young people, their sets of beliefs about standard Turkish and its vernaculars as well as the ways they negotiated, reproduced and contested these beliefs in the two settings. The comparative perspective illuminated the different ways young people’s language beliefs and communicative practices served as sites for the negotiation of personal and collective identities and social relationships. Moreover, it contributed to our understanding of the different ideological pressures that shape their beliefs and practices, such as nation-state ideologies and the restrictions and affordances of the institutional settings.

Turkish-speaking young people drew on iconic representations of standard Turkish associated with an ‘educated’ and ‘urbane’ social persona, and dichotomizing discourses of ‘more educated/less educated’ and ‘urbane/provincial’ in wide circulation in the two communities. These representations and discourses were also evident in the two Turkish complementary schools presented in this study, whose aim is to educate the next generation of British-born youth in standard Turkish and mainland Turkish history and culture. Through these discourses, schools seek to align language with ethnic affiliation and underplay the internal heterogeneity of the Turkish-speaking communities in London. Consequently, key actors in Turkish complementary schools in London (e.g. teachers, managing committee members) played an active role in constructing and legitimizing discursive spaces for the use of the standard. Teachers in particular emerged as ‘exemplary speakers’ of the standard, and regularly policed linguistic boundaries (Excerpts 1-2). They set ‘metadiscursive standards’ as evaluative criteria in order to inculcate their pupils that the standard was a valued resource, both symbolically and instrumentally. Indeed, the data analysis indicated how young people’s use of the standard during lessons reflected their prior history of socialization into its norms and values (Excerpt 2). It also illustrated their awareness of the positive images of personhood linked with it, as they attempted to align their self-image with that of standard language users as ‘educated’, ‘urbane’ and ‘successful’ (Excerpt 2). The emphasis on the standard, however, resulted in the omission and subsequent invisibility of the vernaculars in teacher-pupil exchanges during lessons.

Institutionally-regimented linguistic representations and discourses about the positive attributes associated with the use of standard Turkish were absent in the mainstream primary school in Athens. Similar to all state primary schools in Greece, this was a Greek-medium-only school. English was the only foreign language taught at the time, and none of the children’s community languages were taught, including Turkish. Because of the school’s ‘intercultural’ status and the implementation of a culturally-responsive curriculum, standard Turkish was afforded some limited visibility. Some Turkish-speaking children strategically drew upon their limited literacy in the standard for specific classroom literacy activities, for instance when sharing artefacts from home during literacy hour, using bilingual (Greek-Turkish) dictionaries and comparing scripts in Greek and Turkish (Excerpts 3-4). In line with their understanding of the school’s culturally-responsive curriculum and practice, teachers tended to respond briefly to these contributions, maintaining the low-key visibility of Turkish in instructional contexts.

While young people came to recognize the positive values attributed to speakers of the standard as a form of symbolic and socio-economic capital, they contested the dichotomizing discourses associated with standard and vernacular language use and constructed their own axis of oppositions. In London and Athens, young people like Berna and Bahriye also displayed a strong loyalty to the vernaculars they spoke at home and in their respective communities, and challenged widely-held negative images of personhood associated with their use (Excerpts 5-6): Berna’s regional accent emerged as an important aspect of her multiple affiliations across transnational spaces, namely London and Central Turkey, her family’s place of origin, despite the complementary school teachers’ efforts to level out regional phonological variation. Bahriye introduced a new axis of oppositions, mapping standard speakers in her community in Athens with ‘those who show off’ and vernacular speakers with ‘those who do not shown off’.

Further research can explore the evolution of these co-occurring yet seemingly contradictory socially-constructed processes in Athens and London, where the prestige of the standard is accepted on the one hand and challenged on the other. Turkish complementary schools play a crucial role in delineating and reinforcing the boundaries between standard and vernaculars. Within the Turkish-speaking communities in London, however, there is a vocal minority that advocates a higher visibility for the Cypriot-Turkish language, culture and history, including the teaching of Cypriot-Turkish alongside the standard (Issa 2005). An important question is if and to what extent these agents of change will have an impact on the ideology and practice of Turkish complementary schools in the future. National and diasporic media and cultural products are also crucial agents of change. The increase of the visibility of Turkish vernaculars in Turkish national and diasporic media and cultural products raises the question of in what ways these forces, in turn, may shape young people’s beliefs about linguistic differentiation, and their communicative practices in local language communities, as in the case of Athens and London.

**Transcription Conventions**

foreign words: italics

[ : overlapping speech

= : latching

(( )): author’s comments

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2. The term 'Turkish-speaking communities' is a collective term commonly employed in the UK literature to describe Turkish-speaking Cypriot-Turkish, mainland Turkish and Kurdish people living in Britain (Creese, Baraç, Bhatt, Blackledge, Hamid, Li Wei, Lytra, Martin, Wu and Yağcıoğlu-Ali 2008; Issa 2005; Lytra 2011; Mehmet-Ali 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Turkish case study was one of four interlocking case studies which also involved the following communities: Bangladeshi (Sylheti-speaking) in Birmingham, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese-speaking) in Manchester, and Gujarati in Leicester (Creese *et al*. 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The head of ‘East London’ Turkish School’s managing committee reported that in the past, Turkish-speaking Kurdish youth attended the school, but that was no longer the case at the time of the fieldwork. In recent years, Turkish-speaking Kurds have set up their own complementary schools in an effort to promote Kurdish language, culture and identity among British-born youth in London (Issa 2005). A discussion of Turkish-speaking Kurdish youth in Turkish and Kurdish complementary schools is however beyond the scope of this chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) is an academic qualifation awared in a particular subject (here Turkish) and generally taken in a number of subjects by students aged 14-16 in secondary education in England. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)