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End-of-Project Report: Crossing languages & borders – Intercultural language education in a conflict-troubled context

Ben Rampton (*King's College London*)
Constadina Charalambous (*European University Cyprus*)
Panayiota Charalambous (*King's College London*)

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Crossing Languages and Borders:
Intercultural language education in a conflict-troubled context

Final report
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< 4,000 words

Abstract

This is a final report to the Leverhulme Trust of a project funded from 2012 to 2015. After long-established hostility, as a reconciliatory gesture in 2003, the Republic of Cyprus introduced optional Turkish-as-a-Foreign-Language classes for Greek-Cypriots. Our investigation of adult and secondary school classes asked:
a) how do teachers and students manage to teach & learn the language of a former enemy?
b) what are the implications for efforts to produce intercultural understanding through foreign language teaching?
c) what are the implications for sociolinguistic theory?
The report includes a brief account of the grant, the research activity, conclusions and achievements, and publications & other outputs.

1. The grant

Funded by the Leverhulme Trust (RPG-2012-477), *Crossing Languages and Borders: Intercultural language education in a conflict-troubled context* was a three-year research project (July 2012 – July 2015) collaboratively undertaken by the Centre for Language Discourse and Communication at King's College London and the Department of Education Sciences at the European University of Cyprus. The research team was awarded £151,303 to investigate the prospects of intercultural language education in the context of Modern Foreign Language Education in conflict-troubled societies. The project looked at the case of Turkish language classes in Greek-Cypriot education, where the language to be taught is associated with a traditionally hostile ethnic group – a historic 'enemy'. The research team consisted of the following:

- *Principal Investigator*: Professor Ben Rampton, Centre for Discourse Language and Communication, King's College London. (*Commitment*: on average 5.7 hours/week per week: 2-3 h/w, plus 3w. teaching reduction in Yr2 and Yr3)
- *Co-investigator*: Dr. Constadina Charalambous, Department of Education Studies, European University Cyprus (*Commitment*: on average 8.2 h/w: 2-3 h/w, plus 2 months teaching reduction in Yr1, 2months in Yr2 and 1 month in Yr3)
- *Co- investigator*: Dr Roxy Harris, Department of Education and Professional Studies, Kings' College London (*Commitment*: 5 h/w)
- *Research Officer*: Dr. Panayiota Charalambous, Department of Education Studies, (*Commitment*: full time employment in the project)

Most of the research activity took place in Cyprus (fieldwork between 10/2012 – 05/2013, data processing and analysis), but was substantially supported by regular skype meetings between team members and twice yearly annual face-to-face meetings in London and Cyprus.

2. Objectives

The project aimed to advance our knowledge of the relationship between other language learning and inter-ethnic understanding by focusing in a conflict-troubled context, and was centred on the following questions:

a) what strategies and practices are used in teaching-&-learning the language of a former enemy?

b) what are the implications of these strategies and practices for sociolinguistic theory?

c) what are the implications for intercultural MFL pedagogy?

3. Research activity:

To investigate these questions, the project drew on a range of well-tested frameworks from linguistic ethnography (Rampton 2006, 2007), which allowed the analysis of often subtle yet significant teaching and learning practices in and out of the classroom, connecting these to participants' explicit views on language, to inter-ethnic relations and to their biographical and social profiles.

   The research was a continuation of Constadina Charalambous' doctoral research (2009) which in 2006 conducted fieldwork in Turkish classes in Greek-Cypriot secondary and adult education. That research suggested that the legacy of conflict turned the teaching of Turkish as an MFL into a highly sensitive ideological process, far removed from mainstream accounts of intercultural understanding in foreign language learning. In replicating the 2006 research, our data collection methods in 2012-13 included participant observation, audio-recording, interviews, document analysis and a simple questionnaire.

   Ethnographic fieldwork took place between 10/2012- 05/2013 and involved two types of state-run institution:

a) *secondary schools:* 2 teachers, 3 schools, 8 classes, 78h observations, 51h recordings

b) *adult education centres:* 3 teachers, 3 schools, 3 classes, 102h observations, 51h recordings

Furthermore, we conducted interviews with both Turkish learners and Turkish teachers in all research sites. These included: 22 pair or small-group interviews with secondary school students (with about 50% of the student participants); 16 individual interviews with adult learners; and 5 interviews with collaborating teachers. In addition, we also distributed a short survey questionnaire to all participating learners with 80% return rate (109 adolescents, 24 adults); and analysed relevant educational documents (curriculum documents, ministry circulars to schools, other educational and promotional material etc.)

   For the purposes of training, our Research Officer, Panayiota Charalambous, also attended the KCL/ESRC Summer School on *Ethnography, Language & Communication* (30 June – 4 July 2014) on advanced methods of data analysis, directed by Ben Rampton. In terms of research scheduling, Yr1 was devoted to preparing and conducting fieldwork, while in Yr2 we proceeded with transcriptions and the thematic coding of our extensive data-set (detailed fieldnotes, 88 lesson transcripts, 43 interviews), using NVivo 9 software. Based on this analysis, Yr2 and Yr3 yielded 20 research reports addressing different aspects of the empirical data. These covered:

- o analysis of survey data (29 pages)
- o comparative overview of the contexts in 2006-7 & 2012-3 (21 pages).
- o teaching/learning practices in secondary school (2 reports 65 pages in total)
- o teaching/learning practices in adult classes (2 reports, 101 pages in total)
- o marketing strategies for attracting students in MFL secondary classes (24 pages).
- o a case study on teaching Turkish culture (9 pages)
- o micro-analysis of an episode of classroom interaction (22 pages)
- o synthesis of insights for secondary schools (2 reports, 47 pages in total)
- o interviews with secondary students (3 reports, 119 pages in total)
- o interviews with adult learners (3 reports, 91 pages)
- o comparisons between adolescent and adult data (25 pages)
- o popular media and popular culture in the data (24 pages)
- o Current policy reforms influencing Turkish (10 pages)

Following report preparation, each of these documents was the focus of intensive written and/or oral commentary and elaboration within the project team.
The close examination of our findings from this ethnographic study also led to theorizations of the role of language learning in securitized environments, which are outlined in detail the sections that follow.

Problems and changes

Although in general the research project followed the initial research design closely, a few changes were made along the way to adjust to the actual circumstances:
- given the sensitivity around issues of Turkish language and teaching and learning, data collection methods were limited to whole-class audio recordings (instead of radio-mics & video). But this still yielded very rich data for analysis and interpretation.
- Fieldwork was conducted in secondary schools and adult institutions concurrently rather than consecutively, as the former took place in the morning and the latter in the evening. This allowed for more flexibility in data collection in both sites.
- Leverhulme granted permission to transfer £4,500 allocated to Ben Rampton for teaching reduction to Constadina Charalambous at the European University of Cyprus. This allowed for further micro-analysis of data on the original language (Greek).

4. Conclusions and achievements

After a long period of separation following violent conflict between Greek- and Turkish-Cypriots, EU Accession processes in 2003 led to an opening of the border between the north and south parts of Cyprus, and soon after, Turkish was introduced as a 'Modern Foreign Language' (MFL) option in Greek-Cypriot secondary and adult education. But Turks/Turkish Cypriots were still seen as the enemy, both in public discourse and in schooling, and the promotion, teaching and learning of the 'language of the enemy' was difficult. Because they are usually formulated in conditions of relative peace and stability, mainstream theories and pedagogies of MFL fail to capture the practices and processes that we observed in these classrooms, and

a) our project breaks relatively new ground documenting language education in contexts of (in)security and enmity, necessarily also challenging the universality sometimes assumed in orthodox accounts of MFL education.

In addition,

b) it contributes to our understanding of peace education, identifying the role that learning the language of the former enemy can play in post-conflict reconciliation processes.

a) FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN A CONFLICT-TROUBLED SETTING

Communication and culture in class?

In mainstream MFL theories, lessons are seen as occasions for practising communication in the language, with a view to engaging with other language-speakers outside the class. But this wasn't possible in many of the Turkish language classes we observed. Many secondary students of Turkish told us that they had no intention of ever talking to a Turkish-speaker, and there were occasions when the teacher made a positive comment about Turkish-speaking people in passing in the classroom and this sparked intense reactions, at least momentarily jeopardising their authority. Adult classrooms were more open to communication with Turkish speakers, but there was respect for learners who were reluctant about crossing the buffer zone or interacting with Turkish-Cypriots. So especially in secondary education, these Turkish language classes may be best interpreted as an extended but hesitant exploration of the possibility of learning Turkish, as a (precarious) *prelude* to the commitment that language learning normally entails (metaphorically, much more a matter of 'throat-clearing' than 'utterance').

Strategies for the promotion and teaching of Turkish

Amidst a range of other foreign language options introduced to secondary schools in 2012, teachers attracted adolescents to these classes by attempting to 'commodify' Turkish within the MFL 'market' of languages, promoting it as an easy language likely to result in good end-of-year grades – a pitch that was directly at odds with the views and experience of adult learners (as well as accepted wisdom). And once students had joined the classes, the most common strategy we observed was for teachers to focus exclusively on grammar and vocabulary, largely suppressing the socio-symbolic aspects of Turkish. There is a well-established philological tradition that supports this 'Latinised' pedagogy, but it runs counter to the 'best practice' tenets of intercultural communicative Language Teaching. In Cyprus, however, it reflected an acute sensitive to the delicacy of GC/TC relations, and it could be seen as a useful contribution to the reconciliation process (see below).

To understand these processes in more general terms, it is necessary to situate the Turkish language teaching and learning within a set of spatial, temporal and interpersonal coordinates that is radically different from the frame within with other-language learning is normally seen.

Conceptions of the mobility afforded by other-language learning

Foreign language learning is most commonly associated with travel abroad, but such assumptions about mobility-facilitated-by-language-learning could not be taken for granted in the Turkish classes. In exceptional cases at secondary school, teachers sometimes 'cosmopolitanised' Turkish by positioning it as a European language and introducing the possibility of travel to Istanbul. But this was exceptional, achieved only either by the most

accomplished teacher or in a class with well-recognised 'leftist' reconciliation sympathies. And even here, it was qualified with an emphasis on the Istanbul's – Constantinople's – Greek heritage.

- o With the opening of the border between the north and south of Cyprus, both adult and adolescent students travelled to the Turkish-speaking part of Cyprus. But especially for adolescents, rather than resembling tourism, these visits to 'occupied territory' often had the character of *pilgrimage* back into family history, visiting homes and villages that they had fled from in 1974.
- o EU Accession envisaged the reunification of Cyprus, and the opened borders also meant that Turkish-speakers visited the south part of the island. This could have created the possibility of Turkish functioning as a 'local community language', and of learners using it in their mundane interaction in Cyprus. But stories and role-plays involving the use of Turkish in everyday life in Cyprus were seen as controversial in the secondary classes, and in the adult lessons, it was usually students with active links in the north, not the teachers, who encouraged these activities in class.

Time frames orienting the learning of language

In regular foreign language education, language learning is largely future-oriented, a preparation for communication after and outside the class, but the situation was much more complicated with Turkish. History loomed very large in Turkish language learning, both for adults and adolescents. Adolescent learners had to contend with the experiences of war and loss passed on within families, as well with the 'taught memories' of conflict dominating the curriculum. Meanwhile in the adult classes, learners engaged in processes that refused the dominant narratives and that instead offered scope for rewriting their identities, drawing *inter alia* on their lived experiences of Turkishness before the war (e.g. coexistence with Turkish-Cypriots, knowing bits of Turkish).

Committing to the language learning project as an individual in a family in history

The war and dislocation with which Turkish was historically associated meant that there was much more involved in learning the language than individual choice and personal aspiration. Instead, language learning was an inter-generational process, sensitively tuned to past family trauma. Interviews with secondary school students provided evidence of teenagers talking about learning Turkish with their parents, and adult learners often constructed their Turkish learning as a process of coming to terms with a troubled collective history, as a duty of Cypriot citizenship, committing to a peaceful future in a reunified island.

How general are processes of this kind?

It was noticeable locally that students and teachers who had spent substantial periods outside Cyprus, or who had grown up in hybrid spaces outside the mainstream, adjacent to the Turkish-Cypriot community – i.e. the minority Maronites crossing to visit their village Kormakites in the north; Greek-Cypriots residing in the island's only mixed village, Pyla, in the buffer zone – were more relaxed about the idea of using Turkish in everyday life, communicating with native speakers and talking about its lingua-culture. Even so, for most Greek-Cypriot learners of Turkish, the world (or 'chronotope') evoked by the Turkish language involved apprehensions of communication, culture, mobility, development and agency that were very different from the assumptions that usually underpin foreign language

learning in conditions of peace and stability, or indeed the learning of French or Italian in Cyprus itself. And it is clear from other research on language learning in security-oriented environment, such as Pavlenko (2003), Uhlmann (2010; 2012), Karrebaek & Ghandchi (2015), that the Cyprus case is not unique.

b) FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES AS A RESOURCE FOR POST-CONFLICT RECONCILIATION

Given the history of TC/GC relations, teaching-&-learning Turkish faced challenges that are seldom discussed in the literature on MFL. But there were two features of the Turkish classes that allowed them to function as a contribution to reconciliation.

First, the very 'ordinariness' of the foreign language class was itself a resource. Curricular foreign language learning is an unspectacular but long-term, widely-established, institutionally organised activity that demands a significant investment of time and effort, and the Turkish language classes meant that Greek-Cypriots regularly shared a space where things and practices linked with Turkish had a low-key presence close at hand once or twice a week, travelling back and forwards between school and home in homework bags, accessible for closer association if students wanted and were able.

Second, students with different views were spared the need for confrontation by the *ideological plasticity and multivalence* of language. Many participants were, as already noted, able to engage with Turkish because it was presented as a neutral, even mathematical code. But in addition, there were others who saw it either as a potential weapon, as a flavour of the cosmopolitan, or indeed as a feature of local life. This meant that students could participate in the same class with very different ideas of what they were learning.

Peace education programmes often focus on the narratives and rituals of the groups in conflict, and Bekerman & Zembylas, for example, conclude that when emblematic practices are foregrounded in this way, "collective memories are so deeply ingrained" in these that "it is just too difficult to create openings" (2012:207). But allowing multiple interpretations of the socio-symbolic significance of Turkish and leaving its reconciliatory potential unstated, Turkish lessons brought people into the vicinity of otherness as a matter of routine, and occupied their attention over periods of time that were long enough to host small and gradual shifts in outlook. Such shifts were, of course, far from guaranteed, but there was good evidence that Turkish lessons helped a number of students orient more constructively towards a peaceful future.

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5. The principal award-holder's personal evaluation of the research project

The project has been successful (see above), and this has derived from effective team collaboration, blending an expert and experienced grasp of very sensitive political, cultural and linguistic processes in Cyprus (C. Charalambous, P. Charalambous) with senior academics' understanding of the project's distinctiveness and interdisciplinary potential as a sociolinguistic study (Rampton & Harris). Although Turkish has been classified as a 'foreign language' in Cyprus – a curriculum classification that contributes to its value for peace and reconciliation (see above) – a new term like 'troubled heritage language' would be *analytically* more apt, deserving wider currency if/as securitised situations like these are studied more often in ('troubled heritage language' could also cover Arabic in Israel, as well perhaps as Farsi among refugee Iranians in the Copenhagen). Through extensive interaction with other scholars working in situations affected by large-scale conflict, we are developing sociolinguistics and security as a relatively new field of enquiry, simultaneously building links with scholars in International Relations.

Because teaching-&-learning the language of an enemy is still a relatively uncharted process, our empirical work so far has concentrated more on extensive ethnographic description than on interactional micro-analysis, but this will change in the period ahead.

6. Publications and other outputs

Project publications

Charalambous P., C. Charalambous and B. Rampton [in press] "Desecuritizing Turkish: teaching the language of a former enemy and intercultural language education. *Applied Linguistics.*

Rampton, B., & C. Charalambous. [in press] "Breaking classroom silences in London and Nicosia" *Language & Intercultural Communication*

Charalambous, C., P. Charalambous, K. Khan & B. Rampton 2015. Sociolinguistics and security. *Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies* 177. At https://www.academia.edu/17000682/WP177_Charalambous_Charalambous_Khan_and_Rampton_2015._Sociolinguistics_and_security

Rampton, B, Charalambous P., C. Charalambous 2014 "Desecuritizing Turkish: teaching the language of a former enemy and intercultural language education". *Working papers in Urban Laguage and Literacies* 137. At https://www.academia.edu/9067477/Desecuritizing_Turkish_Teaching_the_language_of_a_former_enemy_and_intercultural_language_education._2014_with_P._Charalambous_and_C._Charalambous_

Project publications in preparation

Charalambous, P., C. Charalambous, & B. Rampton (in preparation) "Navigating precarious territory: Teaching Turkish in Greek-Cypriot classrooms". In S. Coffey & U. Wingate (eds) *New Directions for Language Learning in the 21st Century.* London: Routledge

Charalambous, C. (in preparation) Crossing as a 'technical redoing': De-politicizing language teaching in a highly ideological context. Part of a special issues on Language Crossing, to be submitted at *Critical Inquiry of Language Studies*

Charalambous, C. Charalambous, P., & Rampton, B. (in preparation) "Language learning for de-securitisation and peace-building: Mapping the links in Cyprus" to be submitted to an International Relations journal

Dissemination

During the project we have been involved in the following:

Organising panels, workshops, seminars and visits:

1. Research workshop, with invited colleagues from Israel doing similar research on Arabic-Hebrew bilingual schools (EUC, 2013)
2. Data workshop by Ben Rampton and Constadina Charalambous at the conference *Breaking Classroom Silences: Addressing Sensitive Issues in Education,* (EUC, 2013)
3. Colloquium on '*Conflict, security & the politics of language learning*' (KCL, 2014).
4. A panel on 'Securitization, conflict and the politics of language learning' at the *5th Explorations in Ethnography Language and Communication conference* (University of Manchester, 2014). The panel comprised of three presentations (by the project team; Kamran Khan; and Marta Karrebaek & Narges Ghandchi) and a discussant (Karel Arnaut).
5. 4-day working visit of Dr Allon Uhlmann who has researched the teaching of Arabic in Israel
6. Round Table: Language and securitization/desecuritization in the context of Cyprus. The event comprised of two presentations: one by Dr Constadinos Adamides on securitization in Cyprus and one by the project team on Turkish learning and desecuritization. (EUC 2015)
7. Professional training workshop for Greek-Cypriot teachers of Turkish '*Language learning and a legacy of conflict',* (EUC 2015)
8. Microanalysis data workshop project data (EUC 2015)
9. Project-final colloquium in London entitled '*Language security and otherness*', with three presentations (project team, Prof. Brigitta Busch, Dr Kamran Khan) followed by a panel discussion (Prof Karel Arnaut (KU Leuven), Dr Rebecca Bryant (LSE), Dr Rebekka Friedman (KCL), Dr Nicholas de Genova (KCL), Dr Catherine Baker (Hull)). (KCL 2015).

Presentations:

1. Poster: *Breaking Classroom Silences: Addressing Sensitive Issues in Education,* (EUC, 2013).
2. Poster: *The Role of Education in a multicultural Cyprus,* (University of Nicosia, 2013)
3. Paper: "Breaking classroom silences in London & Nicosia", LDC Research Day *A Tribute to John Gumperz (*KCL, 2013).
4. Paper "Navigating precarious territory: strategies for the teaching of Turkish in Greek-Cypriot classrooms" at the LDC Colloquium '*Conflict, security & the politics of language learning*' (KCL, 2014).
5. Paper: "Negotiating the place of Turkish as an MFL in Greek-Cypriot secondary education" at the *3rd Crossroads of Languages and Cultures International Conference* (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2014).
6. Paper: "Turkish as a foreign language in Greek-Cypriot secondary education 2003 – 2013: from the perspective of educational policy" at the *13th Pancyprian Conference of the Cyprus Pedagogical Association* (University of Cyprus, 2014)
7. Paper: 'MFL teaching and learning in conflict-troubled contexts' in the *BAAL-Routledge Applied Lingustics Workshop 2014* (KCL 2014)

8. Plenary lecture: "Breaking classroom silences in London & Nicosia" by Ben Rampton and Constadina Charalambous, presented at the 14th *International Conference of the International Association for Languages and Intercultural Communication* (IALIC 2014)
9. Paper: 'Desecuritizing Turkish: strategies for teaching Turkish in Greek-Cypriot classrooms' in the Conference *Languages in Crisis?* organized by the Greek-French project Econolang. (University of Thessaly, 2014).
10. Paper: 'Desecuritizing Turkish: teaching the language of a former enemy and intercultural language education' in the seminar series of the War Crimes Research Group, Department of War Studies, (KCL 2015)
11. Paper: 'Crossing Languages and Borders: intercultural language education in a conflict-troubled context'. (EUC 2015)
12. Paper: 'Language learning for desecuritization and peace building: mapping the links in Cyprus' (KCL 2015)
13. Paper: 'Desecuritizing Turkish: intercultural education and a legacy of conflict' in the conference SSEES100 *The politics of teaching and learning languages* (UCL 2015)

7. Future research plans

We have a very rich dataset which we will continue to investigate, both descriptively and theoretically. Among other things, we will be addressing relevance of the Cyprus case for contemporary theorizations of language in relation to space, time and borders.

We have also established good links with other researchers working on questions of language learning and security (e.g. Prof Karel Arnaut, Dr Allon Uhlmann, Dr Martha Sif Karraebek, Narges Gandchi, Dr Kamran Khan, Prof Brigitta Busch), on issues of peace education (Dr Michalinos Zembylas, Prof Zvi Bekermann, Dr Halleli Pinson, Dr Gal Levy) and security, peace and international relations (Dr Rebekka Friedman, Dr Nicholas de Genova, Dr Constadinos Adamides).

Drawing on these interests and links, we are planning an edited volume and a funded network bid on language and security (jointly with Dr Khan).

Appendix

Brief summary
(500 words)

1) ORIGINAL AIMS

After long-established hostility, as a reconciliatory gesture in 2003, the Republic of Cyprus introduced optional Turkish-as-a-Foreign-Language classes for Greek-Cypriots. Our investigation of adult and secondary school classes asked:

d) how do teachers and students manage to teach & learn the language of a former enemy?
e) what are the implications for efforts to produce intercultural understanding through foreign language teaching?
f) what are the implications for sociolinguistic theory?

2) FINDINGS

a) *Teaching-&-learning the language of a former enemy*

Adults were generally more willing to question traditional hostilities than adolescents, but it was still difficult teaching-&-learning 'the language of the enemy', and we identified three strategies:
- the most common was to 'Latinise' Turkish, focusing exclusively on grammar and vocabulary, suppressing the language's cultural associations;
- Turkish was sometimes 'cosmopolitanised' ('delocalised), positioned as a European language *beyond* from the Cyprus problem;
- in adult classes, it was sometimes treated as a 'local community language' for use in Cyprus, but this was normally introduced by students.

b) *Implications for foreign language teaching?*

Our findings challenge mainstream ideas about foreign language teaching (FLT), which are usually formulated in conditions of peace/stability:
- the 'Latinisation' of Turkish contradicts the 'best practice' tenets of intercultural FLT, but in Cyprus, it reflected acute sensitivity to the delicacy of Greek-Cypriot/Turkish-Cypriot relations;
- FLT is typically associated with tourist travel, but mobility was controversial in the Turkish classes, and when adolescents visited 'occupied territory', this was often more like a *pilgrimage*, visiting places families had fled in 1974;
- FLT is normally future-oriented, preparing students for communication beyond/after the class. But history loomed large learning Turkish. This wasn't just about individual choice and personal aspiration – learning Turkish was more of an inter-generational process, tuned to past family trauma.

Turkish classes contributed to post-conflict reconciliation in two ways:
- the 'ordinariness' of classroom language learning as an unspectacular but long-term, widely-established, institutionally organised activity meant that Greek-Cypriots regularly shared a space where practices linked with Turkish had a low-key presence close-at-hand;
- the ideological 'plasticity' of language itself spared students with radically different views the need for confrontation: to different learners all in the same class, Turkish could

be a neutral/quasi-mathematical code, a flavour of the cosmopolitan or the local, or even a potential weapon.

Particularly among adolescents, Turkish classes are best interpreted as an extended but hesitant exploration of the possibility of engaging with things Turkish, a (precarious) *prelude* to the commitment that language learning normally entails.

c) *Sociolinguistic theory*

Language in settings affected by large-scale conflict is not yet very widely researched, but our findings bear similarities to other studies (re e.g. learning Arabic in Israel), and we are making good progress establishing 'sociolinguistics and security' as a significant topic.

3) OUTPUTS
4 articles published/at press; 3 in preparation; 9 events organised; 13 presentations

4) STRENGTHS/WEAKNESSES
Based in London and Nicosia, the project has benefited from excellent team collaboration, as well as from a growing network of researchers focusing on language, conflict and security.